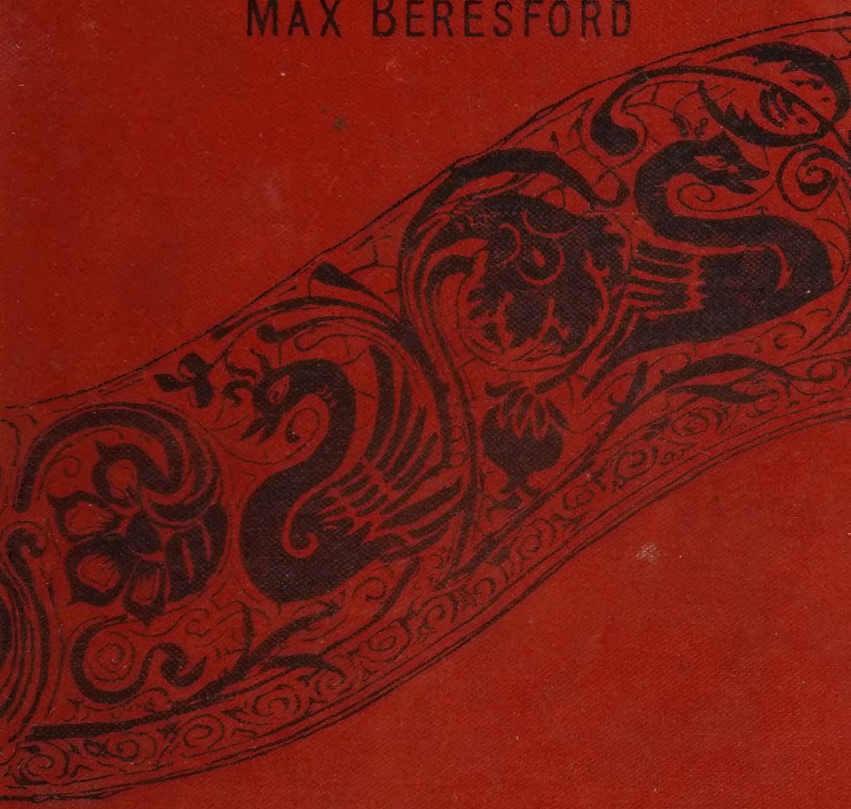
BELHAVEN

MAX BERESFORD



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BELHAVEN

BY

MAX BERESFORD
AUTHOR OF 'BONNIE DUNDEE.'

'This curse will come on us,
To see our idols perish.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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TO

M. D.

BELHAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE TOWERS.

'A maze of corridors contrived for sin.'

'DADDY, I can never say good-bye to you. I almost wish I were not going.'

'Come, Sybil, it is no use fretting. And yet—well, I wish you were not going too.'

'Do you?' Sybil asked, putting her arm within her father's, and looking tenderly into his face. 'Shall you miss me so much? Elspeth has promised to take

care of you, and you need not be anxious about me; I shall be all right with the Haldanes. What makes you wish I were staying?'

'Oh, nothing. But the place will be dull without you. And, when you come back from Berlin, you will not care so much for your old father, eh?'

He pinched her cheek, his laugh overcoming the doubt in his voice and the frown on his face. Sybil glanced at him and set her pretty head determinedly.

'No fear!' she said, with decision. 'Neither Berlin nor anything in this wide world could make me care less for you. But you will be dull, and there will be no one to cheer you when you are sad. Daddy dear, tell me what it is that troubles you. I am sure I could make it easier for you to bear.'

Gordon looked down at her with a strange hesitancy in his expression. Should he tell her? Would confession lay the ghost that haunted him till life was nothing but a hideous nightmare, and his days were hateful, companioned by the ugly thing that refused to leave him?

He only hesitated a moment. He was not of the stuff that makes confession possible. It was madness to revive that old story—to take from the girl her happy trust and confidence in him. Besides, what was life worth to a man that was always harking back to the past? It was weakness that prompted the act of confession. No, he would not tell her!

'No one can relieve a man of his individuality, Sybil; and that is the heaviest burden I have to bear. There is nothing splendid or noble about human nature, so

you must not wonder that my own defects should make me gloomy.'

This was his concession to sincerity, and it satisfied him.

'You have evidently been talking to Mrs. Haldane!' Sybil cried. 'Imagine my noble daddy taking the pessimistic view of human nature she has. Don't a man's views depend on his constitution? And isn't it absurd to say you are not splendid?'

And Sybil might be pardoned for her admiration of her father. He looked a splendid man as he trod the sands with his firm, free step, his handsome face lifted proudly and defiantly. The two were walking westward, and the glory of the sunset was full on their faces—crimson, radiant, vanishing; showing them alike in walk, and pose, and gesture.

There the outward resemblance ceased. Gordon was fair and blue-eyed; Sybil dark and slim, with brown eyes reflecting every phase of a strong and passionate nature.

Gordon, too, was passionate, and his face was stormy with feeling. But only the lined brow and mouth betrayed the sombre moods and brooding melancholy of which few besides Sybil knew. The face he showed the world maintained always a gay good-humour that emphasized the smile under his handsome moustache. In public he was never moved; and it was only at home that he laid aside his mask and showed himself a man struggling with the demons of remorse and unexplained terror.

In these moods Sybil was always sympathetic and pitiful. She accepted Elspeth's statement that they were caused by sorrow for his young wife; and she gave her father,

whether gay or morose, unbounded love and admiration.

He was immensely popular in Dunbar,—the friend of every man, woman, and child in the place. Anyone needing help was certain to apply to the wealthy banker, and never in vain.

He accepted Sybil's opinion of himself with a smile. It is pleasant to be idealised and frankly adored by a pretty girl; and he had a masculine susceptibility to flattery.

'So you think I am splendid, eh?'

'Yes, indeed! I should like to tell you how splendid, only it would make you vain; but every time I say my prayers I pray that I may grow like my honest, noble daddy.'

'Good God, child, *don't!*'

The cry seemed wrung from him; but when he met her wide-eyed gaze he

covered its passion by a forced laugh.

'Little goosey-gander!' he said, 'you will idealise me till I am too good to live. All the good boys die young, don't you know?'

'That's true,' she said, nodding her head, sagely, 'for certainly they don't live to grow up.'

After that a silence fell between them. Sybil was troubled, and wondered why her words should have called forth such a cry from her rarely-moved father.

Alas, poor child! She was doomed to know its cause some day.

They were going along the sands in the summer sunset, and the quiet waves lapped at their feet; the surf breaking in long, level lines at the mouth of the bay. The village of Belhaven lay behind them;—a cluster of cottages set in two streets that

forked from the road two miles out of Dunbar. To their right was the Bass Rock, its white sides touched to warm colour in the sunset; and away to the left the woods and houses of West Barns sloped towards the sea, forming a pretty foreground to North Berwick Law rising beyond. In the distance the outlines of the Pentland Hills fringed the red clouds; and the shores of Fife lay like a dream on the waters.

And by-and-by Sybil and her father turned and walked back to the Towers, the windows of which were ablaze with colour. The red light shot out to greet them like the flash from an angry eye, and they both noticed it.

'What a curious effect!' Sybil said. 'It is red as—as murder! There! don't look so shocked, daddy. Since we have a ghost at the Towers, why shouldn't it be painted

in good strong colours? I hate your mild sensations that miss the force of tragedy and haven't the play of comedy to redeem them. Let us have the lurid ghost of the shilling shocker, "With red garments and a cry that freezes the soul; with bony finger pointing to the murderer, and "—— Daddy! are you vexed with me? Have I frightened you?'

She paused to stare at his scowling face; and at her glance his brows relaxed, and he attempted to smile.

'No—no. Of course not! Why should I be vexed? Don't talk of eerie things to-night, Sybil. We have nothing to do with such horrors; and to-morrow I shall want a pleasant memory to atone for your absence.'

'Oh! my pleasant memory will be this dear place. I shall miss the shore and

the waves, the rocks all browned with weed, and the fishing-boats, more than I can tell you. I shall enjoy travelling; but, ach! how good it will be to get back to bonnie Scotland!'

'Well, you must not stay away too long. I wonder if everything will be the same when you come home. Shall you love me as much as you do now?'

'You only want me to flatter your vanity, sir. I am not going to pander to your weakness,' said Sybil, setting her head high.

He looked at her almost, one might have thought, with aversion. He remembered that gesture so well in her mother; and it made him shiver with some secret terror.

The girl did not know what associations her reference to murder had called up, for the dread that shadowed Gordon's days had been kept from her.

'God has taken mamma,' old Elspeth had answered, when the two-year-old baby had cried for her pretty mamma. And in time Sybil came to believe her mother was dead, though no one could tell her where her body lay.

The drawing-room was almost dark when they entered it, and Sybil tossed down her hat and walked across to the piano.

'I am going to sing,' she announced, wheeling the stool round to face her father; 'I'll give you "Castle Gordon" for the last time.'

In another moment Sterndale Bennett's plaintive melody echoed through the room.

'Loud blaw the frosty breezes,
The snaws the mountains cover;
Like winter on me seizes,
Since my young Highland rover
Far wanders nations over.
Where'er he go, where'er he stray,
May heaven be his warden;

Return him safe to fair Strathspey,
And bonnie Castle Gordon.

The trees now naked groaning
Shall soon wi' leaves be hinging,
The birdies, dowie moaning,
Shall a' be blythely singing;
And every flower be springing.
Sae I'll rejoice the lee-lang day,
When by the Mighty Warden,
My youth returns to fair Strathspey,
And bonnie Castle Gordon.'

Sybil's voice was sweet and strong and penetrating, with that rare quality in it that the technical call timbre, but Gordon stood listening to her with careless approval.

'Dr. Rutherford should sing that to-morrow,' he said. 'You'll be the "young Highland rover far wandering nations over." Certainly the song is more appropriate for him than you.'

At the words Sybil blushed vividly, and, leaving the piano, she came and stood

beside her father. He glanced wickedly at her.

'Have you bidden the doctor good-bye, eh?'

The colour in her face deepened, and her voice was shy.

'He is to be at the station to-morrow,' she said, with bent head.

Gordon laughed.

'Oh, that is it! Well, I wish you were safely back again, child. My mind misgives me about letting you go.'

'How strange you are to-night, daddy!' she exclaimed, forgetting her shyness. 'Berlin is not the other side of the world. Is it too late? Can't I decide to remain with you?'

'No, no, child; no, no! Go, and God keep you. Now you had better take a long night to prepare you for your jour-

ney. Off you go! Don't sit up talking to Elspeth, mind.'

He sighed as she kissed him, and Sybil's eyes filled with tears. It seemed, after all, a cruel thing to leave him in his loneliness; and, now that the parting was near, she began to realize that she should be separated from him for many long months.

At the thought a big tear splashed down on his hand; but she looked at him with a smile, winking violently to get rid of the tell-tale moisture.

'I'm no greetin',' she cried, gaily. Then, to avoid betraying herself further, she gave him another hug and fled from the room.

Outside the door she paused to strangle the sobs that echoed strangely in the silence of the large house.

She had often noticed before the unbroken stillness of the old place; an un-

canny absence of sound to which the Towers owed its ghostly reputation. But to-night the silence was positively impressive, and appeared to be weighted with meaning. A high wind had sprung up, and she could see the trees outside bending in the blast. But indoors not a sound echoed. The servants' apartments in a distant wing were too far off for voices to penetrate to the front of the house. The silence was like that of the dead.

It chilled Sybil;—an unusual effect, for she was too healthy to be very imaginative;—and she walked down the passage and stopped at a half-open door from which came the red light of a wood-fire.

'Oh, Elspeth, you have a fire;—that's charming! I am quite cold, so I will sit with you before I go to my room. Come

and sit down and let me put my head on your knee as I used to.'

The old nurse hobbled across the room and seated herself, spreading out her withered hands to the flame.

'Nursie,' said Sybil, dreamily, 'I don't wonder people think the Towers is haunted. A minute ago the silence made even me creepy. And, when you consider, it *is* a curious thing that this great place should be so awfully still. As soon as you come into the hall the quiet strikes you.'

'Toots!' said Elspeth, scornfully. 'What would you be expectin' in an auld hoose full of oak and big rooms?'

'I know the thing can be explained. Mr. Ladislaw was saying to-day it was owing to the house being built in a hollow.'

'If the minister was here the day,' interrupted Elspeth, 'it bodes ill for them that gaes doon tae the sea. Ill tak the mon! His place is the poopit; he shouldna come on Tuesday coortin' the flesh he renounces on Sabbath.'

A mischievous spark glowed in Sybil's eyes.

'I am very fond of Mr. Ladislaw—he is a dear,' she said, demurely.

'I care naethin' aboot that,' Elspeth said, sharply. 'He knows weel you're to crass the watter the morrow's morn, an' he shouldna hae come here the day. There isna a fisher doon at the harbour wad gae to sea after a sicht o' a minister. And he had nae call to be crackin' wi' you aboot the ghaist.'

'Elspeth,' Sybil cried, starting up eagerly. 'Did you ever *hear* the ghost?'

'Dinna speer at me,' said the old woman, putting out her hands as if to ward off the question.

'Oh, but I must! In ghost stories personal evidence is everything. It's my last night, nursie; you can't refuse your bairn.'

Who could resist Sybil's coaxing tones, and the bonnie face uplifted pleadingly? Certainly not Elspeth.

'Lassie,' she said, reluctantly. 'It's been heard but once. The nicht Robert Gordon's wife won awa.'

'Mamma! The night she died?'

'Na, my bairn, we canna tell. She juist won awa. Mebbe she's no deid.'

Sybil sprang to her feet white to the lips.

'Not dead! Mamma!'

'Whist, whist, bairn! Yes, yes, she's

deid—nae doot o't. She wadna hae bided awa frae her mon an' her bairn gin she hadna been amang the ghaists.'

'Tell me all about it—everything!' Sybil cried, feverishly. 'Oh, why was I not told before?'

'There isna muckle to tell, lassie. It was eighteen years ago, ae nicht efter the dinner. The bonnie leddy cam in tae see you bedded; a' in white silk she was, wi' stanes shinin' on her braw roond airms. She kissed you lyin' wi' your wee handies faulded, an' then awa she went tae Robert Gordon. An' they had words, for she had an awfu' shairp tongue, an' she passed frae the room cryin', "When you want me, you maun seek me." And that was the last we e'er saw of her. We saucht her high, we saucht her low, an' Robert Gordon nigh distraught wi' grief, but never

was she foond frae that bad day tae this.' Elspeth rose in the firelight, and stretched out her skinny hand, while her voice fell to an awed whisper. 'But a' that nicht and for days efter we heard the ghaist wailin' through the hoose; an' tappin's an' cries that showed she was deid. An' the Towers won a bad name, and maistly this part o't. It was no dwelt in then, and nane ever went near by nicht, not even Robert Gordon himsel'. You mind he was sair angert wi' you when you made this room intil a parlour?'

'I remember. But he let me have my way, and it's a dear cosy little room for you, nursie. But, oh! Elspeth, my mother! What could have happened to her? Was she murdered, do you think?'

'Toots, no! Wha wad hae lifted his hand against a Gordon? Murdert? Na,

na, never! Robert Gordon offered rewards up and doon and a' over; but nane ever foond her.'

'But, surely, there must have been something to explain her disappearance? If she was not in the house, some one must have seen her going away. What did people think, Elspeth?'

'Hoo can I tell?' said the old woman, evasively. 'Folks' tongues are aye waggin'. The search was made, an' she wasna foond. That was a' we kenned.'

Sybil rose from the floor, cramped and shivering.

'My poor daddy! No wonder he was miserable. And that is why he would never let me talk about her?'

'Ay. He wad ne'er hae her name callit before him efter that. It was a sair blow to him, and it made a gey change upo'

him. He wadna bide i' the hoose his lane, an' mony a nicht he wad walk till he droppit. Yet he wadna leave the place, though I prayed him mony a time. He kept a fair face to the warld, and nane but Elspeth kens hoo he has greetit for the bonnie leddy.'

CHAPTER II.

FOREBODINGS.

'As the sea's life thy soul in thee.'

'I CAN'T tell how it is, but my mind misgives me about Sybil,' Gordon said to Mrs. Haldane, as they stood on the platform at Victoria the next evening.

'That's your Scotch superstition,' said the lady, sharply. 'Sybil is right enough so long as she doesn't set her affections on any man. If your mind misgave you about my Bessie, it would be more to the purpose.'

Gordon glanced at Bessie with raised

eyebrows, then his face relaxed. She was a pretty little brunette, with red cheeks and sparkling eyes; and, beside her mother, looked like a rosy apple on a gnarled bough.

Mrs. Haldane's appearance had all the charm usually associated with that of the grim, gaunt female whose matrimonial suits have not been successful.

Up to the time of her marriage, she had been an emancipated woman;—it puzzled even herself to know why she had been offered, and had submitted to the shackles of matrimony;—but the birth and education of Bessie had made her, in practice, a disciple of Mrs. Grundy.

'The only safeguard against emancipation,' she would say, sighing, 'is to be the mother of a girl. One sees then that social restrictions have a use.'

But in her widowhood—for Mr. Haldane

did not long survive the discipline of marriage with her—she cast many a glance backward to the country she had left. And domesticated women said this look towards the cities of the plain (I do not think the ladies intended the jest; I hope not!) had turned her woman-hood into a pillar of salt that served only to preserve the axiom, a woman renouncing the graces and privileges of sex ceases to be flesh and blood.

She tried in vain to check Bessie's high spirits, her unsuccessful attempts being like those of a hen who finds herself in the maternal relation to ducks.

Gordon took pleasure in the encounter of wills between mother and daughter, and openly ranged himself on Bessie's side; for, as Elspeth would say, he was 'an unco' mon for the lasses.'

'Miss Bessie, I give my little girl into your care; you will be a mother to her?' he said, twinkling, for stately Sybil was fully half a foot taller than Bessie.

Conscious of her six years seniority, Bessie accepted the charge with dignity; but her mother interposed.

'He is putting notions into the child's head,' thought Mrs. Haldane. 'Gordon is handsome enough to attract her, but I'm not going to allow it. No one knows what has become of his wife . . . I trust Bessie will prove herself capable of acting a *sister's* part to Sybil before she assumes any graver responsibility,' she said aloud, primly.

Sybil flashed a glance of amusement at her father, while Bessie laughed outright.

'Mother, you are too absurd! This horrid fog must have affected your discern-

ment. Mr. Gordon, I am sure it is not safe to cross the channel to-night. Suppose we go to the Lyceum instead, and take the morning boat to-morrow.'

'Bessie!' interjected Mrs. Haldane.

Gordon caught at the suggestion.

'I wish you would,' he cried, eagerly. 'I have a curious reluctance to let Sybil go; and it's a nasty night. Now, Mrs. Haldane, we only want your consent.'

'Nonsense! Afraid of London fog! By the time we get to Newhaven the night will be clear. You should not encourage Bessie in her frivolity; and your reluctance is merely superstition. Like all Scotchmen you have let your religion run to seed, and now it is nothing but superstition. Sybil, my dear, I hope you don't share your father's weakness?'

'No,' said Sybil, with a little shrug.

But even while she spoke she felt chill, for in the midst of the station's din, the steaming engine, and busy voices, she was enwrapped in an awful quiet—a stillness like the silence of the Towers.

'Is everything ready?' she asked, the moment after; and, to rid herself of the disagreeable sensation, she busied herself with rugs in the carriage.

'Sybil, what are you doing?' Bessie laughed. 'We shall want all those things on the boat. Leave them alone now. Is that the way she looks after your comfort, Mr. Gordon?'

'Yes. I am always at her mercy, Miss Bessie. Don't you think some one else should take me in hand now?'

'Yes, you are not too old to reform.' She glanced critically at him. 'But don't find anyone to undertake the task while

Sybil is away, else there will be riot and bloodshed at the Towers when she returns. You have a ghost already, so you don't want a murder to make the place interesting . . .'

She stopped short, surprised at Gordon's changed face; and then, to overcome her own embarrassment at having said something *mal-à-propos*, she went on, hurriedly,

'Don't you think, Sybil, that houses now-a-days are like men? They must be marked out from the rest by something sensational to render them interesting. Just as a man who is capable of a great passion, or who commits a crime, ceases to be common-place.'

'Any person who thinks goodness is common-place must be ignorant of human nature,' Mrs. Haldane put in, severely.

'I don't care,' Bessie, said, defiantly; 'I

would rather marry a man who had force enough to sin than a bread-and-butter saint!'

Gordon gave her a keen look, and then smiled into her eyes.

'That must be why you are still heart-whole, Miss Bessie. But keep a good courage, and in time you may come across some splendid rascal bad enough to win your regards.'

Bessie pouted, and nodded her head at him saucily.

'I believe you would suit the part very well. Please remain single till I return.'

'I will. Now, Sybil, good-bye. I see they are locking the doors.'

In another moment they were steaming out of the station, and Gordon stood on the platform, looking after them with a smile in his eyes.

'Curious thing how near she came to the truth that time!' he thought. 'Her theory is not sound, though, for a man's weakness will urge him to crime just as soon as his strength. Was it strength or weakness that made me . . . Ah, well, that's all done with. I'm not likely to be confronted by my past again. I wonder she has never married. She is not so cold as Sybil; just the sort of woman to brighten a home. I might think of her, if only . . .'

He broke off his ruminations to call a hansom, and was soon driving through the fog to his hotel.

The feeling of uncertainty and danger induced by his drive lasted through the evening, and recalled his fears for Sybil.

'I wish I had not let her go,' he re-

peated, over and over again, as he paced restlessly about.

Outside the roar of the city echoed, and when he looked out into the night he saw the fog thick in the street and the blinking lamps only faintly outlining the pavements.

It was just as foggy at Newhaven, and Mrs. Haldane and the girls could scarcely see their way to the boat. The confusion was indescribable; men shouting, whistles blowing, a medley of lights, and luggage, and voyagers. Sybil was unused to travelling, and blindly followed Mrs. Haldane's lead. That lady displayed the coolness and self-possession of a general, and marshalled her satellites in a manner that did more credit to her head than to her heart.

'Thank goodness, that is over!' she

panted, throwing herself down on a lounge when they reached the saloon.

Then she struggled up again, brisk as ever.

'Now, girls, take off your hats and make yourselves comfortable. There's no knowing when we shall reach Dieppe in this fog, so expect a night of it. Bessie, where are the rugs?'

Bessie gave a careless glance round.

'I had them on deck, I know. Oh, yes, I put them down on a seat and forgot them.'

'And you call yourself a child of mine!' —Mrs. Haldane's tones were a fine mingling of resignation and sarcasm.—'Well, you won't see them again, and we shall have to shiver all night.'

'Not till I prove that they are lost,' Sybil said, vigorously, starting up and

making her way to the companion stair.

The *Psyche* was pitching frightfully, and she had not estimated the difficulties of her quest. The deck was crowded with men and women, standing, sitting, and lying about; and the lights were powerless against the fog, so that she was only aware of hopeless confusion, and the difficulty of finding the rugs amidst it all.

The Newhaven lamps were already fading, and a choppy sea boiled round them in a black mass, except where the white foam, on which the lamps threw fantastic lights, marked the *Psyche's* path.

She paused at the head of the stair, debating if she should go on; and waited there, unconscious of the attention her beauty gained from a group of men.

At last she made a move forward, searching the seat where Bessie had been sitting,

but without discovering the rugs. She was turning away when a young man came forward, raising his hat as he spoke.

'Excuse me, you'll just be seeking your rugs. The steward has them in charge, if you'll take the trouble to go to his cabin.'

'Oh, thank you. Where will I look?' she began.

But he anticipated the question.

'The cabin is close by. Will you let me lead you to it?'

He was clearly Scotch, and Sybil felt at once that she had found a friend. She flashed a pleased look at him, then, recollecting that it behoved her to be discreet, she bowed gravely.

'It is difficult for a lady to find her way alone,' he said, preceding her, and turn-

ing to offer his hand when the pitching of the boat rendered her footing insecure.

He took charge of the rugs and escorted her back to the saloon where he left her; his 'I am very well pleased to have been of use,' ringing pleasantly in Sybil's ears. And he went back to the damp, upper world with a glow at his heart that banished the discomfort of his surroundings.

'She's a fine lassie,' he said to himself. 'Scotch, too, but proud enough to be English. She is quite young, else she wouldn't have been so ready to let me help her. I wonder the dragon in charge let her come on deck alone. I should say the old lady was sea-sick, only that those grim women have nothing to do with such weaknesses.'

The boat at this moment gave a lurch

that took Alec Macdonald off his feet, and put an end to his soliloquy. He picked himself up, lit a cigar, and stood gazing over the ship's side, dreamily thinking of his mother in the far-away Scotch manse.

He can see the cosy room looking out towards the hills lighted by the last faint afterglow of the sunset. He can hear the cows lowing in the byre, for it is milking-time, and the lonely song of the thrush outside the window. The crimson curtains are not yet drawn, and a peat-fire glows warmly on the hearth, for the autumn evenings are chilly. There in the book-case are his college prizes, contrasting with the worn volumes of his father's library,—the old life and the new meeting in the Highland manse.

The minister himself is sitting writing the sermon that on Sunday will stir the

simple folk to higher things. The phrases are homely enough, Alec knows, but there is a life in them often missing in more ambitious efforts. The silver-haired mother is opposite. Her knitting has fallen from her hands, and her deep eyes are far away, for she is thinking of her laddie. By-and-by her lips move. She is praying for him; and, while she prays, the ship on which he stands is straining through a perilous sea to an awful doom!

CHAPTER III.

ON THE ROCKS.

'Restless, ravening seas—
Would the echo sigh farewell?'

A SUDDEN crash,—a grinding, grating horror! The boat shivers from stem to stern, and the waves rush over her with hideous triumph. Hoarse cries from the seamen, wild shrieks from the passengers, mad riot and confusion of men in peril;—the *Psyche* is on the rocks!

Before her the lights of Dieppe shine dim through the mist; land cannot be far

distant, but below her a black sea boils, and she is on the rocks!

Twenty seconds after, and everyone is on deck rushing madly hither, thither—what way safety lies. But safety lies nowhere! A dark sea is beneath, a dense night above, around. Half the lamps are extinguished, and the light at the stern only reveals the horrors of the scene.

'The boats! the boats!' and a rush is made to the ship's side. Fighting, struggling, mad in the grim madness of peril, strong men in whom manhood dies easily push aside the weak and clamber into the boat. The sailors are demoralised; pulleys and bolts are beyond control. Lower the boat! She may get to land and bring rescue. Creaking and groaning, she swings loose, heavily freighted. Slowly, slowly she begins to fall, then—the wheels escape

control! An instant's sharp revolution, and the suspended boat heels over, and is lost with its crew in the night.

A yell of anguish rises, and some of those on deck leap into the sea. Death sudden and swift is preferable to the long-drawn agony of waiting. But now the captain has succeeded in enforcing discipline. Orders are being given and obeyed. If the *Psyche* can hold out twenty minutes longer, there is a chance of safety for all.

Calm, white, tearless, Sybil stands. Her limbs are numb. Around her, enfolding, clinging like a clammy pall, she is wrapped in a terrible stillness—the weird silence of the Towers. So Elspeth has been right. Her father's superstition, her own inaction, have been warnings of her doom. She is to die. Yes, death has come, and she

will never see again that dear home, the yellow sands, or crimson evening skies of the bay. The light will dance on the waves, and the surf will roll in level lines along the shore, and the windows of the Towers will redden at the sunset. The May lights will throb across the night, but she will never watch them again; ah, never again! And the sea she has loved so well will be round her, while her soul voyages on the unknown seas of the great deep to which she goes.

But at least she will die bravely:—a death worthy of her hero-father. She sees his grief at her loss, and her eyes fill with tears for his sorrow. He will lose all. Yet he will have no graves to weep over, wife and child sleeping in strange resting-places.

She turns from her thoughts to see if

she can do anything for her friends. Mrs. Haldane is on her knees tending a fainting woman, and Bessie—her pretty eyes drowned in tears—is crouching on the deck.

'Oh! Sybil!' she gasps, 'I can't bear it! the screams, and the darkness, and the awful, awful sea! Is there no hope? *Must* we go down?'

'No, no. Likely we'll escape. Courage, Bessie! See, they are getting another boat ready. We may be in time——'

'But the last boat! Sybil, did you see? Oh!—and a face rose close beside me,—an awful, drowning face!'

'Bessie, you mustn't talk so. If God will, we shall escape. Come away, and see if you can't help Mrs. Haldane.'

She stoops over the unconscious woman, and Mrs. Haldane glances up coolly.

'I can't get her round—a poor, helpless thing, with no spirit. It's a wonder I dragged her on deck, for such women are no good in the world, and what is the use of saving them?—I suppose it's human nature that makes us do useless things. Look at Bessie! If crying had been any good, she'd have saved us all. I always knew she was a Haldane—takes after her father. He'd have been alive now if he had had any backbone. Well, Sybil, this is awful, isn't it? If you girls were only safe, I wouldn't mind for myself. But it isn't hopeless, you know. A question that can be discussed has always two sides to it; and as long as women can talk there's hope.'

Mrs. Haldane's philosophy is a well-intended ruse to make Sybil forget her danger, and it partially succeeds.

Presently she turns at a touch on her arm. Alec Macdonald stands beside her, breathless.

'Come!' he cries. 'They have got one boat away, and they're manning another. I can get you in,—come.'

She makes a step forward, but Bessie's despairing face stops her.

'My friends,—I can't leave them,' she gasps.

'You must;—there's only room for one.'

In his eagerness he drags her, but she stops him.

'I'll not go,' she screams. 'I can wait,—I'm not afraid. Bessie, you go!—quick! quick!'

Bessie springs forward, and Alec scarcely hesitates before he leads her away to the boat.

'Thank God for that!' says Mrs. Haldane, coolly, turning again to her charge.

Sybil strains her eyes after Alec and Bessie, but she can see nothing; only now and then she hears directions sung out in unmistakable Doric, and she knows he is to the fore.

Then his voice is lost in a wild yell, for, with a terrible heaving strain, the *Psyche* parts in two, and slowly, horribly, settles down into the boiling gulf. They are knee-deep in brine. Around them breaking mast and cracking spar; the boat shivering and groaning like a wounded creature, and above the clamour of sinking vessel and drowning men the noise of the waves thunders despair and death. A huge wave sweeps the deck, and Sybil, clinging with all her strength to a mast, closes her eyes to shut out the sight of

Mrs. Haldane being borne away. In that instant she passes through an eternity. The *Psyche* is plunging beneath her. A horrible numbness paralyses her arms. Before her eyes flashes a face that she knows is her mother's. In her ears rings a voice hoarse with frenzied haste.

'You must take the chance of the last boat. It's crowded, but it may reach the land; if not——'

Then her arms relax, the waves are round her, and she knows no more.

CHAPTER IV.

TO DIEPPE OR DUNBAR?

'Their finding out themselves can work no good
To what they love.'

On opening his paper next morning, Gordon's eyes lighted first on the telegram announcing the loss of the Newhaven boat. Stunned and uncomprehending, he stared at the words: *Went to pieces on the rocks. Total wreck. Great loss of life.* There was a list of the saved, but a hurried glance through showed him that Sybil's name was not among them. Yet

he could not realise that she was lost—the bright, beautiful girl, the only creature on earth that he loved.

Then he laid his head on the table, and groaned aloud:

'I deserve it, I deserve it! But the child should not be punished for the father's sin.'

At this moment a telegram was brought to him; and, like one in a frenzy, he seized and tore it open.

A moment passed before he was calm enough to read—'Johnson, Dunbar.'

It was from the bank, and he threw it aside with an oath. What did it matter to him if 'urgent affairs necessitated his immediate return'? He had lost Sybil; affairs might take what course they pleased. Ruin, loss of reputation—he faced them recklessly. They were nothing to him

since she would never know. An immediate return to Scotland was not to be thought of. He must go to Dieppe and make inquiries on the spot. He would take the next train to Newhaven.

And all the while the vision of Sybil was before him. Her bonny face lighted by those bright eyes of hers, the hair curling over her forehead, the dimple in her cheek; her mischief, her tenderness, they were all before him. He could see the worship in her eyes; he could feel her arms round him; he could hear her singing as she had sung that night,

> 'May heaven be his warden;
> Return him safe to fair Strathspey,
> And bonnie Castle Gordon.'

And now, would she ever return to her home again?

He dashed from the room and down the steps.

'A telegram for you, sir,' said the porter in the hall.

Gordon took it from the man and tore it open.

'*Sybil safe.*'

That was all he read at first, for the words danced before his eyes, and he had to clutch at the door to keep himself from falling.

'Thank God!' he groaned, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. 'She's safe—my crime hasn't alighted on her. Man,'—he turned to the wondering porter, —'I thought I had lost her, but she is safe!'

'Is it the young lady who was here yesterday, sir?'

'Yes. She was on the boat that went

down last night, but she's all right. What does the wire say?'

'*Sybil safe. Ill from shock. Come if possible.—Haldane.*'

The elation passed from his face. Mrs. Haldane would not send for him unless Sybil were dangerously ill.

'What time does the next boat start?' he inquired.

'Not till evening, sir. You are too late for the morning boat.'

Gordon looked anxious, and then hurried down the steps to the telegraph-office, where he despatched a message to Mrs. Haldane:

'*Crossing to-night. Wire particulars of Sybil's condition.*'

This telegram was opened by Bessie, who received it with much disgust.

'What selfish creatures men are! He never even asks if we have escaped.'

'It's human nature,' said Mrs. Haldane, in the tone of one providing a sufficient excuse. 'Besides, Bessie, why should you think he would care whether you were drowned or not?'

Bessie received her mother's keen look without flinching.

'You must have misunderstood my remark,' she said, with a little shrug. 'I didn't say I thought he would care. I merely said he had not even asked if we had escaped.'

Mrs. Haldane was for the moment nonplussed, then her hard features relaxed. Bessie's cleverness never failed to gratify her, even though she herself was the victim of it; and Bessie knew well enough that she was more than a match for her mother.

'I will go and sit with Sybil while you send the telegram,' she said; rising wearily, for she was exhausted from the shock and strain through which she had come during the night.

Sybil was lying as she had left her, still unconscious, and Bessie sat down by the bed to watch her.

Alec Macdonald had succeeded in keeping her afloat until the boat, returning from the shore, had picked her up with Mrs. Haldane and several others. There was no room in it for him, and he felt equal to swimming to shore. But it was further than he had thought; and, before the boat came back, he had become thoroughly exhausted, had given up the struggle, and was drifting helplessly with the tide.

While Bessie sat beside Sybil, wondering what had become of the brave fellow who had given up his place to her, Sybil stirred and half opened her eyes.

'Elspeth—daddy—are you there?'

'No, Sybil darling, it is I—Bessie.'

She stooped over the bed, and Sybil gazed blankly at her.

'Bessie—where am I?'

'At Dieppe. In an hotel. Oh, Sybil, I am sure you mustn't talk!'

'No; but I want something. That lad—he was Scotch too—where is he?'

'I—I don't know. On the boat——'

'The boat!' Sybil interrupted. 'Oh, I remember!—Bessie, tell me about it. Was he—was your mother——'

'Drowned? Not at all. Now go to

sleep, dear. We are all safe, and you have only to get well.'

Bessie was determined, but Sybil seized her hand.

'Tell me his name—that lad—who saved me—then—I'll rest.'

She was feverish and excited, and Bessie tried in vain to think of a Scotch name that would serve to soothe her. Nothing occurred to her but Robin Adair, and at last, rendered desperate, she suggested it.

To her surprise and relief, Sybil accepted it without question.

'Robin Adair?' she murmured, drowsily. 'I think, yes—I have heard it before.'

She fell asleep after that, and Bessie stole out of the room to tell Mrs. Haldane of her return to consciousness.

'But she is bothering herself about that

Scotchman, mother. Do you know what became of him?'

'No; but they have just found a body that answers to his description. There is no doubt he was drowned, for he went down with the ship, and was not picked up by any of the boats. Don't tell Sybil this. As soon as she can be moved, I must get her away out of all this excitement. I'll go now and wire to her father that she has come round.'

When Gordon received Mrs. Haldane's telegram, he debated with himself. Should he go on to Dieppe or return to Dunbar? Sybil was safe and in good hands, whereas something was evidently wrong at the bank. Why should the inspector have recalled him so suddenly?

Sybil's danger had made him lose sight

of business matters until now, and he knitted his brow over the question. What could Fleming Johnson want at the bank, after all? He thought of him with wrath in his heart, inexplicable, because the inspector was an entirely inoffensive person, whose sole vice was the collecting of snuff-boxes which had really belonged to Robert Burns and other celebrities. The bare idea of the bank inspector asking blandly for keys and vouchers, tranquilly peering into deed and security-boxes, and verifying everything at leisure, somehow made Gordon angry.

He had not intended to visit his broker's in Throgmorton Street this time at all. Stocks would come right by-and-by if left alone, and he could write from Scotland. Nevertheless, something drew him irre-

sistibly eastward along the Strand, Fleet Street, and Cheapside.

Opposite the Mansion House he ran against Tom Meredith. Truly a soothsayer this; a man bearing a reputation far and wide for profound judgment on financial and market questions. Mr. Thomas Meredith's bank-parlour appearance and his command of the very best brand of Stock Exchange slang, together with the fact that he had himself lost £75,000 in stocks, explained his high repute.

'Well,' said Gordon, after a while, 'you know everybody and everything; what are the markets doing to-day?'

'Look here, my boy,' said Meredith, in a subdued and confidential tone, 'there's going to be the very biggest bull movement in Mexican rails we've seen these

ten years. I know as a fact that a French syndicate are going to take half-a-million of stock off the market next settling-day, "the shop" are in them up to the eyes.—But, of course, you are not a speculating man——'

'Not I,' said Gordon, smiling; and shortly after they parted.

Gordon employed five stock-brokers to do his time bargains. It is five times easier to be utterly ruined if you thus employ five stock-brokers than if you employ one.

Each of Gordon's brokers was under the impression that the cautious and irreproachable Scotch manager did all his business with one single firm, and that the business in question was solely on account of customers of the bank. Gordon had large transactions with the great invest-

ment firm of Denby, Norris, and Gregg. Now old Mr. Thomas Denby's two favourite themes were these,—the evils of gambling in stocks, and his own aristocratic connections.

'I was just telling Lord Understone,' he said to Gordon, 'that, after all, Scotch bankers have taught us everything we know. Charming girl, his daughter. They've promised to come to us in September. His sister, you know, married a neighbour of yours, Sir Peter Plackless of Dalswistle.'

'Ah, to be sure; yes,' said Gordon.

And then he asked how his account stood.

They understood those matters in the office outside, old Mr. Denby said.

Gordon glanced carelessly at the Exchange Telegraph Company's tape which

was slowly unwinding its fateful coils from the mouth of a machine.

'A wretched invention,' murmured the old gentleman, 'ruins thousands, ruins thousands. Good-day, good-day.'

Gordon had not failed to note that Mexican rails marked 87⅛ ⅜ on the tape.

His account showed a debit of £3,500, the cashier mentioned blandly. This, Gordon had already explained by letter, was due to the delay of an Edinburgh firm of solicitors in taking up £20,000 worth of Caledonian stock. It really represented his own losses in the stock during the last two months.

'I must hurry those writers up,' he said, shaking his head; and then added, after referring to his note-book, 'By the way, I have an order to buy 25,000 Mexican Ordinary for a Belfast firm at the best

prices of the day. Will you see to it at once, and post me the contracts and the transfers to Dunbar?'

The profit on that, he thought, would wipe out the £3,500 debit.

His next broker was of another stamp. He was a very young gentleman of fashion who had not long before been made partner in a steady-going firm on the strength of a large West-End and other banking connections. One of the first clients whom he had introduced was the Scottish Counties Company, and he entertained a profound respect and some awe for the officials thereof.

Gordon was really running a speculation in £37,000 Brighton .E stock on his own account with this firm, and had already lost over £2,000 on the transaction.

'I want you to close that Brighton

stock you carried over for my Glasgow clients,' he said. 'They say they've lost enough on it now. I will send you a cheque for their differences before account day. What is the price now, by the way?'

The sale was done at 110. Gordon made a rapid calculation. He had lost £2,100.

It was half-past twelve o'clock. There entered a cheerful young broker.

'Mexican rails are having a nice old game to themselves,' he sang out. 'Railway bridge at Metlac broken or something. Bill Travers just offered fifty over my shoulder at 82; no takers. They call 'em ¾ buyers.'

Gordon felt a cold dew gathering on his forehead. He quietly took up the tape, which was now spinning away merrily,

and marking little else besides the prices of this infernal foreign railway.

The price came 82 middle; $81\frac{3}{8}$; $81\frac{3}{4}$; 80 middle; 81 middle; $81\frac{3}{4}$ and $79\frac{3}{4}$; 80. He dropped the tape, and quietly walked into the street. He had lost £1,750 in half-an-hour. It was not possible for him to rush back at once to Denby and Gregg's and to close his miserable purchase of Mexican railway stock. His imaginary 'Belfast firm' must first be communicated with.

Meantime, he had the affairs of more imaginary clients to face. Hodges and Todd were a cautious firm, *s'il y'en a*. The partners had an abiding unfaith in all human beings, even in Scotch bank managers. Gordon owed them £790, really representing 'differences' of his own on a large purchase of Brush Light

shares, carried over for three months.

'Shall I give you a cheque for those Dundee people's Brush Lights?' he asked, carelessly. 'I believe the old gentleman is very ill, really dying, and I can't get the transfers signed just yet, I am afraid.'

'Perhaps it would be as well,' Mr. Todd answered.

Gordon made out a crossed cheque on his own bank for £790.

'By the way, I am going to send you some American five twenties for a Dundee client of ours who insists on doing some speculative business. I've told him it's a very foolish thing to do, but we can't offend him. Let me see,' and he looked through his pocket-book. 'Ah, what are Brighton Æ to-day?'

'Everything's very flat,' Todd answered,

drily, 'but I'll inquire in the House, and let you know in a moment.'

This gave Gordon the leisure he wanted. By this time the gambler's vertigo thoroughly possessed his brain. Stocks were all going to swift ruin, he saw, and he was determined to make back his losses by selling to the full. While he waited in the office, he saw with feverish eyes that Brighton .E was now in turn having 'a game all to itself.' Rapidly the price came out, showing a succession of declines.

Todd reappeared.

'They call it $109\frac{3}{4}$ buyers,' he said, 'but it's a weak market.'

Gordon only waited to explain that he would send 'cover' in the shape of a large parcel of American bonds as soon as he returned to Scotland, and then left

Hodges and Todd. There were two other brokers not far off whom he ought to have visited, but he could not face any more horrors that day.

On his way back towards the West-End he called in at Denby and Gregg's. The 'Belfast firm' had just telegraphed to him, he said, to close that unfortunate purchase of Mexican rails. But the stock now stood at 84. He thought he would let the matter stand over.

From the West-End he telegraphed to Hodges and Todd:

'*Sell* 40,000 *Brighton at best.*'

Hodges received the message at four o'clock, went into the House, and, on the strength of the 'cover' promised, sold stock in two blocks at $108\frac{7}{8}$—the lowest point it was destined to touch for the next two years.

Gordon travelled down to Scotland that night like one in a dream, and in the same dream lived through the hours of the day following. At last night came. He could not return to the Towers, to its haunting reproach and memories of Sybil, and he remained in Dunbar at the bank thinking —thinking. The assistant-manager, whose inefficiency had been the cause of his sudden summons, had resigned his post. Johnson, the inspector, had travelled northward, and he was alone, left in solitude to face the ruin that menaced him.

The single gas-light which he had lit left the lofty room in semi-darkness, and threw strange, unusual shadows on the floor. He dropped on to the great arm-chair where he remembered his predecessor sitting, years and years ago; telling dry, old stories of queer clients of the bank in

its early days, and always ending up with his crusted aphorism that any man could be a banker who could tell the difference between a mortgage and a bill of exchange.

Long Gordon sat staring at the door of the great office safe, which looked more and more like the gate of a family vault. Here were kept the boxes containing customers' bonds with detachable half-yearly coupons. All this time he held in his left-hand, half-unconsciously, the key of the safe. He began now to turn the escutcheon on the lock until the revolving letters spelled the word which alone made it possible for the key to work. He had himself chosen that very key-word when the safe was brought from the maker's. It was 'Sybil.' And now he had the letters in order, and the door could open. He glanced rapidly round the room, and then

applied the key. His forehead was burning, and he wetted his dry lips with his tongue.

The heavy door opened very slowly and very gently. He could not help admiring the smooth mechanism of the thing. There, inside, slept the japanned boxes one on the top of the other. A couple of them bore the initials P. & P. D. in yellow letters. He had the key for them also, and he slowly unlocked one. It was full of papers, and he took up and opened out one or two of the crisp bonds, looked at the gilt letters and the engraving on them, and put them back in their places. Then he lingeringly closed and locked the door of the safe and drew out the key.

'Sybil,' he read on the plate, 'Sybil,' 'Sybil.'

Next morning the cheque for £790

which he had given to Peter Todd would be presented over the counter. He pulled a blue slip of paper from his pocket. It gave the 'closing prices' on the London Stock Exchange for that day. Mexican Ordinary Stock had closed at $78\frac{1}{4}$, and Brighton Æ at $114\frac{1}{2}$. He owed £15,000 within two hundred yards of the Bank of England, and the Stock Exchange settling was five days off.

CHAPTER V.

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM.

'Our past is clean forgot,
Our present is and is not,
Our future's a sealed seed-plot,
And what betwixt them are we?'

Robert Gordon lounged easily in an arm-chair, his face lit up with interest, his eyes more good-humoured than usual as he talked to his companion.

'So you have been "wandering nations over"?' he said. 'I wonder if you came across my little girl, Sybil, in your travels? She is at school in Berlin.'

The young man shook his head.

'I was not so far north as Berlin. I've been in the south of Italy, invalided, since September, and should have been there now only I wished to secure this appointment. Johnson wrote me about it, and I am a lucky fellow to have got it so easily.'

'H'm! that remains to be seen. Dunbar is a sleepy little hole from the business standpoint, but one can make a very good thing here of banking by combining other things with it. My income is exceedingly good, though of course I had a better chance than most. Mrs. Gordon,'—his face darkened and he hesitated, then went on briskly,—'my wife's fortune was considerable, and I succeeded to it at— at . . . The house was hers, you know . . . Oh, yes, a man with fair business aptitude

could do very well here. You will not be overdone with work. I have been doing everything lately. The last assistant-manager turned out to be incapable, and while I was away was practically useless. Johnson happened to be here at the time, and took it upon himself to dismiss the fellow before sending for me. *Entre nous*, there has always been friction between Johnson and myself; so, when I came down in answer to his telegram, we exchanged politenesses. Since you are a friend of his, I shall use you as a buffer in my future intercourse with him.'

'There will be very little of that, I hope,' the young fellow laughed. 'But, really, everybody is asleep in Dunbar. Are there no families of position about?'

'Yes, indeed! But, now I remember, I I believe all the best people have been

dwarfed by the duchess. That is the result of living near a county potentate —the little fish don't count.'

'Have you any little fish called Haldane?'

'Haldane? No. I know an Englishwoman of that name, though. And, that reminds me, I must see if I can find a house for her; she is coming north, in a few weeks—to economise, I fancy.'

The young fellow gazed at his discoursive host with amusement. How open and free and ready with everyone's affairs he seemed. It was a new experience to meet a Scotchman free from the national vice of cautiousness; and he found it pleasant to 'draw' the man who was to be his chief.

'I should scarcely have thought you had a little girl old enough to go abroad to school,' he said.

Gordon smiled.

'Sybil does not call herself a child, I can tell you. But it makes a man feel old to have a great, over-grown lassie calling him father.'

He paced up and down the room, a smile lurking under his moustache as he thought of the lad's mistake; and by-and-by he began to boom out an air in a rich baritone.

'Do you sing?' he asked, suddenly breaking off to address his guest.

'No, I'm not musical. I know "God save the Queen," because the folk stand up for it; and I always recognise "Rule Britannia" when they sing it.'

'Oh, that's a pity! We are very musical here—Sybil has a fine voice. But I must not talk about her, else you will think me a fatuous parent.'

'And does Mrs. Gordon sing?'

The question staggered Gordon for a moment.

The mystery that hung about the Towers was so well known that it was a rare thing for any allusion to be made to his wife. From under his heavy brows he gave his questioner a keen look that might have meant 'How much do you know?' or 'Do you suspect anything?'

'She did;' he answered, shortly; then, with a quick return to his former manner, he added, brightly: 'But now I'm not going into my family history. Tell me about yourself. I like your looks. I'm sure we shall get on.'

He stopped in his walk to gaze critically at the young fellow.

'You'll do,' he said, nodding his head and smiling.

His guest smiled back, in no wise disconcerted at Gordon's attitude towards him.

He was a man about twenty-eight, above the middle height, well set, with nothing striking about him, except his fine eyes and resolute mouth.

'There is very little to tell,' he said, simply. 'I am an only child, my father a minister in a country parish. I was educated at Aberdeen, and went through an uncle's bank at Inverness. Now I've had to make way for his son, and here I am, you see, ready for work . . . Hullo, old fellow! want to be friends?'

He stopped to speak to a retriever that had just entered the room, and the dog wagged his tail and licked the hand held out.

'That's a certificate of your respectability,' said Gordon. 'Don is very exclusive

in his friendships. He is a fine fellow, the only survivor of a wreck. The vessel went to pieces out there on the rocks. Every soul lost. I found him on the shore next morning, sitting on his tail, howling. He came home with me, and has remained here ever since.'

'That accounts for his friendship. I have been shipwrecked too. I escaped by the merest fluke. Was picked up for dead among the flotsam and jetsam of the wreck. Fortunately I was found by fishermen, who have a knack of bringing drowned men to life.'

'Oh, there are plenty of fishers here, I can tell you; and shipwrecked men too. The coast is very wild, and we have awful stormy winters. Heavens, how high the wind is! and yet it's curious the house is so quiet! It reminds me . . .' He drew

himself up abruptly, and went on, in an altered tone, 'They have a story down at the shore about one of the fishers going home on a stormy night. He heard a noise behind, and fancying the devil was behind him he made for the house as fast as he could. As he dashed in, the latch caught his coat and held him. Fancying that it was Old Nick that had him he roared for his wife to come and save him. "An' how can I save you fra the muckle deil, an' me has a bairn i' my airms?" says she. "Throw the bairn to the deil, an' come an' help me," he answered. Ah! they are a queer lot the fishers. You must get Mr. Ladislaw to talk to you about them. Whenever you meet him, he has a good story to tell . . . And now I want you to tell me what your ideas are about this new scheme.'

The talk diverged to business, and Alec Macdonald sat smoking and blessing his good stars that he had found such a congenial berth,—a country bank with not too much to do, a large salary, a good-natured, pleasant chief, and the picturesque life of a pretty, sea-girt town. Thinking over the conversation afterwards, he was amused to find that, so far from 'drawing' Gordon, he had gone away absolutely ignorant of his antecedents, while his chief had possessed himself of all his own family history.

Alec was a canny Scot, and the discovery set him on his guard. Gordon's pleasant frankness was a disguise for a nature of extreme subtlety and cleverness, and to succeed he would have to be on very good terms with him always.

Meanwhile, he sat contentedly smoking,

not knowing how much kinder than this had been his good stars. Had he guessed that by a strange cast of fortune he had been thrown into the family of the girl whom he had saved from the *Psyche*, and whom his efforts had failed to trace, he would not have sat carelessly smiling there.

CHAPTER VI.

A FLASH OF WHITE.

'Lo! have we not leashed the twin
Of endless sorrow to sin?'

The December night had closed in with storm and sleet, and the wind howled round Belhaven Towers as if it would tear from it the dark secret it held in its ancient walls.

Old Elspeth sat alone trying to write a letter in the room in which she had told Sybil of her mother's strange disappearance. It was in the oldest part of the

house, a dark wainscoted chamber that would have delighted an antiquary, with its diamond-paned windows reaching to the floor, its heavy carving, and old recesses. Tradition said Prince Charlie had lain concealed here in the stirring times of history, and the ghost of the Towers was thought to have a special liking for the room, its peculiar wail having been heard only in this chamber. It was shunned by the servants, and, until recently, had never been used by the family.

Sybil, however, had taken a fancy to it, and had insisted on using it as her sitting-room. Her father had good-humouredly protested against it, and only indulged her whim on the condition that he was not to be asked to sit there. Sybil did not know the place had a sad association for him. He had spent the last morning with his

wife in it, searching for a secret chamber that she suspected to exist; and, since the time of her disappearance, he had never cared to set foot in it. Sybil and Elspeth were the only people who used it, and on this evening the old nurse was feeling its loneliness and isolation as she had never done before.

It was Elspeth who missed Sybil most. Her father was absorbed in business, and when he sat alone after dinner he pored over the books that he brought with him from the bank. Five months had passed since that awful night when the *Psyche* went down, and the horror of the experience was becoming a faded memory in the hearts of those who had borne it. With characteristic heedlessness, Gordon had relegated it to the past. The careless good-humour, which was one of the secrets

of his popularity, prevented him from suffering keenly or being deeply touched by any incident. Sybil being safe, he almost forgot that he had nearly lost her.

She, too, had begun to think less of the episode, and now only remembered it in connection with the Scotchman to whose bravery she owed her life.

Mrs. Haldane had told her she had seen his lifeless body at Dieppe, and Sybil had grieved for him. She had not even the knowledge of his name to guide her in the inquiries she had made for him, and she could learn nothing further of his fate. But she and Bessie spoke of him as Robin Adair, and treasured his memory as one who had died for them.

Of the three, the terrors of the wreck lingered longest with Elspeth; and at

night, when the wind raged and the moan of the sea echoed round the house, she lived over the scene, and saw the *Psyche* struggling through the midnight, and her bairn clinging to the mast in the midst of the dark waters.

The wind was shricking round the Towers to-night; and, when no blast shook the windows, Elspeth glanced fearfully round; for in the dim room, with its shadowy recesses and strange silence, noises should have echoed, and deep murmurs lingered. Its quiet was uncanny. It looked cheery enough this evening, however, with a fire on the wide hearth, a cluster of candles in the old iron candlestick, and shadow and light flitting over the oaken panels.

Elspeth herself, bright-eyed, with tartan kerchief folded over her breast, her fine

features strongly outlined by the white-frilled cap she wore, was thoroughly in character with the room. She looked like a mother of heroes, and was prouder of the son who had died fighting than of the one who had died a rich man and left her a considerable fortune.

She pushed her spectacles off her nose and looked up expectantly when there came a tap at the door; and her face cleared as an old man shuffled in. It was Sandy the gardener; like herself an old retainer of the Gordons, and her particular crony and gossip.

Sandy was splay-footed, and this peculiarity, in conjunction with the interest he took in his neighbours' affairs, made him a privileged person in Belhaven. He was an inveterate gossip, and supplied Elspeth with the talk of the place. He had a par-

ticular aversion to the wainscoted room, and as he entered he glanced warily round, and shuffled hastily across to the fire, his shoulders shrugged, his little beady eyes darting everywhere.

'An' what ill-like win' blaws you here, Sandy, this awfu' nicht?' asked Elspeth.

'Whisht, whisht, Elspeth wumman! Do you no' ken what the fowk are sayin' i' Belhaven, an' a' roond?'

'They'll no' be sayin' muckle guid, I'se warrant, Sandy. Toots, mon! what maks you blink your ee that gait? Is't the lassie that's bringin' you to me the nicht?'

'Na, na, Moggie's a' richt an' bonnie as a flooer. Na, na, it's no my little lass; but, Elspeth,'—Sandy lowered his voice and glanced round cautiously—'is't true

that Robert Gordon's wife cam in by the nicht?'

'Is't true?' cried Elspeth. 'Sic haverin'! I warrant me it's as true as that you're ower-weel favourt wi' sense, my mon!'

'Na, na, Elspeth, but Marget at the shoppie saw her the nicht—an' meself,'—he glanced round fearfully—'I hae seen i' the gairdin the print o' a foot vera sma' an' vera neat; a leddy's foot, my wumman!'

'An' wad you gae to whisper that Robert Gordon's wife's no deid? Tak' shame to yoursel', Sandy, for a fause-hearted Millar! No' deid! when her mon's been single for her a' these years? No deid! when her bairn's sabbed and greetit for her mammy? Wad you be after sayin' her heart was flint, Sandy?'

'Na, na,' said Sandy, cowering under the storm of indignation he had brought on himself. 'Na, na, she's deid richt eneuch, but the servant lassies are aye crackin' aboot the ghaist, an' I hae seen the print of a leddy's shoe, vera sma' an' vera neat——'

'Ghaists are no ower-weel shod, I'm thinkin',' Elspeth interrupted, drily.

'It's no' for needin' shoemakkers whaur they cam frae then,' retorted Sandy. 'But, however, ye hae heard the ghaist yoursel', Elspeth; dae you mind o't?'

'Na,' said she, severely, 'I min' o' naethin' but the fulishness o' fowk. Marget had sicht o' the laddie Macdonal' that dined wi' Robert Gordon, an' won hame an hoor syne. An' is that a' you cam to tell me, Sandy?'

'Ou ay. Mebbe, though, you dinna

ken the meenister's coortin' Miss Dixon.'

Elspeth lifted her hands in horror.

'Weel, weel,' she said at last, resignedly, 'there's nae fule like a guid fule—an' I thocht he'd set his heart on oor missie. Miss Dixon! that's juist a bittie short-bread wi' sugar-words gien' guid wishes; an' he a little wooden mannie oot o' the bairns' Noah's-Ark—toots! It's no' true. Na, na! The meenister kens ower muckle o' this warld's wisdom than to go coortin' an auld wifie like that! The wee mannie will burn weel, but he'll no' brak weel.'

'Ou ay!' said Sandy, rubbing his hands delightedly. 'The meenister will burn weel! Ay, will he!'

'Ay—an' I'm dootin' you'll no' miss seein' it,' said Elspeth, with direct and bitter humour.

'It's an awfu' nicht,' said Sandy, chang-

ing the conversation. 'Ech, sirs! I could weel believe the spirits were loose, hearkenin' to the win'! An' what's Robert Gordon daein' wantin' missie?'

'He'll no' be wantin' her lang, mebbe.'

'Eh, anither wife?' Sandy asked, eagerly.

'Ill tak' the mon! Anither wife? You're aye crackin' aboot coortin' an' merriage.'

'That's hoo my thochts rin when I crack wi' a wumman, Elspeth. I doot it's nature.'

'If it's nature, it's the nature o' the auld mon, Sandy. Hae you no' had eneuch o' merriage?'

'Ou ay. Mair than eneuch! Merriage is mebbe guid, an' mebbe nae guid; an' a wife's like the mare Robbie was sellin' i' Belhaven yestreen.'

'How?' asked Elspeth.

'He was sellin' the beast to Stevie, an', "Man," says he, "she hasna but twa faults. Ane I'll tell you the noo, an' ane efter you hae paid me. The first," says he, "is, she's unco ill to tak." "Weel, weel, it's no great maitter," says Stevie, layin' doon the siller vera well content, "an' noo the second." "The second," says Robbie, "is, she isna muckle warth efter you hae takken her!" . . . Hearken, Elspeth! What was that?'

The chuckle that ended his story, stopped abruptly; and he and Elspeth leaned forward listening.

Outside on the gravel there was a curious shuffling sound. The two waited in silence; and by-and-by even Elspeth's strong heart beat quicker, for softly, cau-

tiously, a hand seemed to be drawn across the window-fastenings.

'I wad I kenned that Robert Gordon's wife was safe below ground,' muttered Sandy, his teeth chattering in his head.

'It's tryin' the windy-brods!' he gasped a moment later. 'Elspeth, are you no' feared?'

'It's ane that kens the windy leads ben the hoose,' said Elspeth, sturdily. 'Come awa', an' peep through the ither lattice. Ca' canny, my mon!'

They stepped together to a small window and looked out into the darkness, and Sandy gripped Elspeth's arm as a female figure passed them with a flash of white.

'The ghaist! Ca' Robert Gordon!' he panted.

'Ay;' said Elspeth, dropping the blind

she had raised and turning to the shivering old man. 'Gae you an' cry him ben the room.'

'Elspeth,' he gasped, 'it's a wild nicht, an' the passage is dark——'

She withered him with a look of scorn and marched with erect head from the room, Sandy shuffling close behind down the long passage.

The door of the drawing-room where Gordon had been sitting was open, and Elspeth paused on the threshold staring at the empty chair,—a half-burnt cigar smouldering on the ash-plate,—the newspaper crumbled on the floor,—a hassock kicked over, the signs that the late occupant of the room had left it hurriedly.

Then Elspeth turned with her lips set firmly.

'I'm gaein' oot bye to seek that white

wumman,' she said. 'You needna come gin you'se feared.'

'Toots!' said Sandy, recovering his courage and his common-sense under the influence of her scorn and the brilliant light. 'Likely it was the coo oot o' the byre, an' she was tryin' to get the green stuff ower the windy.'

'Ay,' said Elspeth, shortly, 'but a coo doesna rin on twa legs, though it hae feet weel shod, vera sma' an' vera neat!'

The satire silenced Sandy, and he followed without a word when she stepped out into the garden.

The wind howled dismally among the trees that made patches of deeper night on the dark lawn; but it did not deter the brave old woman, and Sandy had to follow.

What they saw that night they kept to

themselves. But the next day Elspeth added a postscript to the letter she was writing to Sybil, and the following week the girl was home again at the Towers.

CHAPTER VII.

ROBIN ADAIR.

'Cast
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown,
Before a coming glory.'

Sybil was sitting on the hearthrug in the firelight, after dinner, critically regarding her father; trying to explain satisfactorily the difference between his present self and the one she had known. Before she went to Berlin, he had been subject to moods; dark hours in which she had had to exert herself to the utmost to win him from his melancholy. He might be cheerful before

the world, but in solitude he had been gloomy and sad. Remorseful, she might have thought him, if it had been possible to associate remorse with a man so blameless. Now she saw him airily good-humoured, brightly nonchalant,—a man that had not a care in the world. And yet, as he sat smiling there, he was cursing the fate that had sent Sybil back to him the breathing image of her mother. How was he to forget the past with the girl before him reminding him daily of its horror? How could he live with her day after day and not betray himself? He could not bear to look at her, and her glance made him impatient.

'Sybil, what are you thinking about?' he asked, suddenly.

'I?—oh, I was thinking how handsome you were.'

He laughed, relieved.

'You are right, Sybil. I'm not such a bad-looking fellow, eh?'

'You are a very vain one!' she said, looking at him proudly. 'If I were a woman, I should fall in love with you.'

He gazed at her quizzically.

'And not being a woman——'

'Oh, you needn't mock, sir! Bessie Haldane said it would require a woman to appreciate a character like yours. I'm only a girl, and incapable of doing it.'

Gordon stroked his moustache, and made no attempt to conceal his pleasure in the flattery.

'So your little friend said that, did she? I wonder if she considers herself a woman —twenty-six! And looking younger than

my own daughter! By-the-way, did you know that Mrs. Haldane had taken Sea-view for nine months? I believe they are coming down this week.'

'Yes; Bessie wrote me. She says she wishes to be near me, but I suspect she has designs on somebody else.'

'I wonder——' Gordon began; then checked himself, with a sigh.

'You wonder what?' Sybil asked.

'If Rutherford will look in to-night. He thinks you came back because you missed him too much to stay away longer. Is it so?'

He pinched her cheek and looked mockingly into her face.

'Of course not!' she answered, proudly. 'He thinks too much of himself—that young man. I'll have to give him a

lesson. Did you meet anyone else in town?'

'Yes; the two Miss Dixons. They will call some time this week.'

'Dear old things!' said Sybil, smiling. 'Are they still the same?'

'Quite. I don't believe they have had their mittens off since you left. Oh, and I told Macdonald I had got my little girl home. He is to call too.'

'That is your new manager, isn't it? Do you like him?'

'Well enough. He has all his wits about him. By-the-way, Sybil, what do you say to selling the Towers and going into Dunbar to live? Would you like that?'

'No, indeed!' Sybil cried, aghast. 'To sell the Towers! Oh, daddy, I couldn't bear it. You proposed it years ago, I remem-

ber, and I told you then I could not be happy anywhere else. Oh, it would be hateful to go away! You are not serious, are you?'

'No, no, child. I was only teasing you.'

He leaned back on his chair and shaded his eyes with his hands. It had always been so. Sybil would never leave the Towers, and he dared not court remark by insisting on it.

She had brought the old years before him, and, under his hands, his brow was dark as he thought of the years of his short married life.

They had been gay enough at first, and he could not mark any special time of change. Yet the happiness had paled before days embittered by ceaseless wrangling, and tortured by taunts in which his

dependence on his wife's wealth had been flaunted in his face. What had caused the change?

The fault had not been his that her name had become a household word for gossip and scandal in all the country-side. He had become tired of the bitter-tongued woman; but when the Englishman took his place, and all Dunbar mocked at him as the hen-pecked husband of a faithless wife, then—ah! how he had hated her! Remorse had not often visited him of late; but to-night, looking at Sybil, a cold shiver passed through him as he remembered the throb of joy with which he had hailed his deliverance, the triumph he had felt when the messengers sent far and wide returned with no news of the missing wife. And then, when it seemed that his triumph had

been premature, that the relief had been only momentary, and then !——But no, he would not allow himself to go back to that haunting past. It was dead ! dead ! And the hated wife had no place now in the hours filled with the presence of this beautiful Sybil. She at least would never make him jealous.

Sybil, meanwhile, was gazing at him with a growing sense of disappointment. Perhaps during her absence she had idealised him ; certainly, now that she saw him before her, he was not all she had pictured. His character no longer stood out in a heroic isolation from that of other men ; and he seemed less earnest, less high-toned than formerly.

Was he indeed not so noble as she had thought him ? Or was it that another

life touching hers had raised her standard, so that in comparison other men must appear dwarfed and insignificant?

The surest test of a man's deterioration is the chasm it creates between him and what is excellent. In Sybil's presence Gordon became conscious of his defects. They moved apart after a while, and the girl crossed to the piano and played a bar or two, while her father stood biting his moustache and tapping his foot impatiently. A sudden sense of want and weariness had overcome him. The creature he loved most had come back to him with a calm, passionless gaze that probed his very soul, and silenced the love he would have lavished on her, reminding him of that he would fain have forgotten.

Life had brought him nothing but discontent;—love, wealth, friends, position,

health; it had offered each gift in turn only to tear it again from the clenched fingers. Had he been compelled to struggle, he might have succeeded better; but certainty of purpose had given way before egotism and conscious superiority, and he had never acquired the stability of effort.

He wondered if he would have been happier if his wife had lived; and he caught himself thinking wistfully of her beauty and the charms that had first drawn him to her. What if his own hand had written his doom? What if he had himself destroyed the only thing that would have given purpose to his life?

While she lived, he had been vain and selfish,—he shrugged his shoulders in natural exculpation of these faults,—but nothing worse; and now——

His thoughts were interrupted by a little cry from Sybil, and he turned round to see her, flushed and tremulous, holding out both hands to Alec Macdonald.

'You are not dead!' she cried, with a half-sob. 'Oh, I am so glad to be able to thank you——'

Her soul was in her eyes as she glanced at him, and for a moment Alec was too astonished to speak. Then he seized her hands in both his :—

'Miss Haldane! It's not yourself!'

'Indeed it is,' she laughed, joyously, 'only I'm not Miss Haldane, but Sybil Gordon——'

'My little girl, Sybil?' Alec interrupted.

'Yes,' she answered, unblushingly; but her father's exclamation, 'You might ask my permission first, young lady,' brought

the colour to her cheeks, and restored her coherence.

'Daddy!' she cried. 'It is Robin Adair, who saved my life on the *Psyche*. You must thank him.'

She was glad to turn away then to shake hands with Dr. Robin Rutherford, who stood in the doorway, gazing with lifted brows at the little scene.

'How do you do, Dr. Rutherford?' she said, giving her hand quietly, while she tried to keep the light from her eyes and the smile from her mouth.

Her efforts were fruitless, and the doctor's breast swelled with elation as he observed the emotion she could not control.

Of course the smile and blush were for him! She had not forgotten their pleasant intimacy of last summer! Well,

she was a nice little girl, and a man might do worse than marry a woman like this, graceful and well-bred, and wealthy withal;—especially since she was fond of him. True, there was that deucedly unpleasant story about her mother, but thank goodness! he was not finical.

Silk purse or sow's ear, what did it matter so that it was lined with gold? And, mystery or no mystery, Belhaven Towers would be a pleasant little freehold to own and hand to a posterity uniting the gifts and graces of the Gordons and the Rutherfords.

The doctor was in high good humour as the evening went on; but Sybil, meanwhile, was comparing the real Robin with the fictitious Robin Adair. The two stood together examining a picture, and she had an opportunity for close scrutiny.

The doctor was tall, dark, polished, suave, and easy. Alec was less refined in manner, less distinguished looking, less striking —an inferior man altogether, one might have thought at the first glance. But his face was strong, not hard like Rutherford's; his mouth was resolute, not cruel like the doctor's; his eyes were keen, not cynical like those of his rival; and, if his manners were not so polished, they were kindlier than Rutherford's, while his face, alight with emotion, was infinitely more attractive.

His brain was burning, his heart throbbing at this strange discovery,—the girl he had saved was not Miss Haldane, but 'my little girl, Sybil.' He had braved death on the *Psyche* for her, and for half-an-hour had held her in his arms while he battled with the waves; but he had come

from out the quick life of that vivid hour to find himself alone;—assistant-manager of a bank in a little northern town!

A prosaic ending, indeed. But in life heroic moments are not frequent. We leave the heights of transfiguration to mingle again with unseeing humanity and its needs. He had gone to Dunbar under protest, bandaging his eyes that no vision beautiful might lure him from the plains; reining in his ambition to the jog-trot of life in a provincial town. The post rendered him independent; and, as it turned out, he was to see the vision again in the bare desert.

In a tumult of emotion he walked home afterwards; he had found his ideal incorporated in the real and actual! The stars snapped in the frosty air above him; a young moon rose palely over the ragged

edges of wintry trees, the moan of the waves filled the silence; but he knew nothing of it all. The only stars for him were Sybil's eyes, the only light a dawning love, the only voice her broken tones. His heart was aflame, his brain reeling in a young man's first passionate consciousness of love.

He was not conceited, this son of the manse, who had been reared with the lofty simplicity and noble ruggedness of his native hills; and he had none of Rutherford's self-consciousness about him. Therefore he did not flatter himself that Sybil's emotion at greeting him was due to more than gratitude to her preserver.

'My little girl Sybil?' he said to himself again, and his cheek reddened in the starlight at the memory of her 'Yes!'

While he walked on to Dunbar, Sybil

was kneeling at the window of her room looking out across the dim, shimmering sea to the stars. Her eyes were tender, her lips smiling, her heart full of rest and thanksgiving. She had not cost that brave fellow his life; and the gravity her father had noticed fell from her face and left it young and bright again. She had no wish to analyse her feelings. A living joy, touched even by thought, might lose its bloom; but she knelt with her face to the stars and was happy.

But in the silence the sea moaned, and as she heard it she shivered. Did she know that even so the sob of a terrible desolation should echo through the starlit spaces of her love? What if she had been a sibyl indeed to see the future! Or even if she had gone downstairs and surprised her father into revealing his true nature?

She had returned from Berlin recalled by that mysterious postscript in Elspeth's letter, but so far she had seen nothing to warrant her sudden summons, and Elspeth closed her lips and refused to explain it.

'Bide a wee, lassie, an' dinna wauken the sleepin' hound. You'se better at hame ony gait.'

And with these enigmatical words she had to be content.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW MUCH DOES SHE KNOW?

'All between is decay.
Dead hours, and this hour that dies.'

Dunbar is a quiet fishing-town perched on a cliff overlooking the Forth; hemmed in by rock and wave from the promontory of St. Abb's Head—where once the Princess Ebba lived and prayed—to the sand and limestone beds reaching southward.

Here come, in the lovely summer-time of blue sea and white-fringed wave, of salt breezes and wind-blown cloud, groups of

children and mothers in search of health. Here too come artists to sketch the grim old castle and the rugged shore; the quaint houses with warm tones mellowed and softened by age; the harbour with grey rock and painted boat; the tight little yachts that poise like white-winged birds a moment within the bar and then pass onwards; the silent fisher-folk whose stormy life leaves its impress on their stormy faces. Here the antiquary is seen peering short-sightedly at the relics of the past,—the grave of the old Norse heroes on Belhaven sands, or the later impress of strife and a nation's conflict.

The place is rich in historic association, from the ruined castle that still guards the bay to Cromwell's Mount where the Protector stood to watch the struggle between royalist and rebel;—from the little brook

whose silver waters were dyed crimson with carnage, to the smiling fields that give hint by rusty spear or whitened bone of the red riot that once stained the green-sward.

It is a pretty place in the summer-time; full of life and colour, with green waves swathed about the feet of the rocks; with white sails of herring boats dotting the blue, and warm yellows and browns shining from roof and wall; while red-coated soldiers and fish-wife in gay bodice brighten the grey cobbles of the street.

The high street is the only one of any importance, and it winds and narrows from the barracks to the ivy-covered church that keeps guard at the gate of the town. Into this street slope the smaller ways or wynds, cobble-paved for the most part; and here most of the busi-

ness life is concentrated, the clock in the town-house keeping a cynical watch on the passers-by.

Down nearer the harbour is the fisher quarter, the most characteristic and interesting part of the town. The narrow street is fringed with net and creel and tub, and at these the fisher-folk sit all day. They smoke too much and are too busy to be great talkers, and the work of baiting lines and cleaning fish goes on in silence. They seldom pause to talk to the passers-by, the only creatures that claim their attention being the cats that sit beside them licking their paws and blinking in the sun.

Dunbar is a very paradise for cats;—a land where it is always afternoon; a sleepy, sunny, well-filled afternoon in which a cat may look before to incoming laden boats,

or cast a satisfied glance to the boat that has already come in.

On the rocks round the harbour-mouth the visitors clamber or sit sketching, reading, talking; while the 'stately ships go on' past the bar to their havens farther north.

Seeing the place in its summer aspect, it is difficult to realise that it is the same frowning seaport, with cruel rock and storm-lashed sea, that in winter glooms inhospitably on the sailor.

The harbour is difficult of entrance; and many a tale is told of shipwreck and loss of life on that rocky coast. It was to this romantic spot that Mrs. Haldane and Bessie followed Sybil the week after her arrival at the Towers. They had taken a furnished house in the town, and had come down, as Bessie said, to view the Scot in his

native wilds; and the Sunday after their arrival they met some of the residents in the drawing-room of the Towers.

Chief among these were the two Miss Dixons, Miss Prissie and Miss Prue, two elderly spinsters who represented the gossip and gentility of the place.

You could tell at a glance that they were sisters; for they dressed alike, from the butterfly that nodded gaily over their little curls, to the pattern of the silk mitts they were never seen without.

But the resemblance ceased with their dress; for Miss Prissie was practical while Miss Prue was sentimental; and, while the one knitted petticoats, the other made woollen flowers as useless as they were ugly. This difference was seen in every detail of their life. When Miss Prissie expected a visitor, she saw that the bed and

sheets were aired. Miss Prue might overlook these matters, but she never forgot to put lavender on the pillows, or dried rose-leaves in the pot-pourri jar. Everybody laughed at the old ladies, and everybody loved them; even the sentiment of Miss Prue being lovable and pretty in her neighbours' eyes.

Sybil used to say that Miss Prissie was like a fine lawn handkerchief, and Miss Prue like the same handkerchief with lace round it; and her distinction was apt enough, though it was evident that Mrs. Haldane would not think it worth while to compliment the sisters even so far as to distinguish between them.

That lady sat aloof from the little party, her air a grim protest against the soft femininity of the Miss Dixons, who looked amenable, and unbent to the masculine in-

tellect as represented in their pastor, Mr. Ladislaw.

In the window recess Bessie was talking to Robert Gordon, who was listening to her with knitted brows and dark face. The girl sat with her face propped on her hand, and a wicked look in her eyes.

'So you absolutely refuse to tell me what is the mystery about this house?' she asked.

'How can I describe what does not exist?' he returned, his manner harsher than usual.

Bessie shrugged her shoulders. Gordon's fine eyes and flattering attentions piqued her into flirting with him.

There was more spice in such a flirtation than in half-a-dozen with callow youths, and she had no fear of its reacting upon herself. She had assimilated her mother's

theories in their crudest form, and even outdid her in contempt of man and independence of the sex; yet this did not prevent her from gratifying her wholesome feminine tendencies towards flirtation.

Mrs. Haldane made no protest against such a state of mind. Bessie, she thought, would never be snared by matrimony; and she allowed her to frivol to the top of her bent.

And yet, somehow, she distrusted the girl's liking for Gordon. Had she dared she would have set her face against the residence in Dunbar; but Bessie was decided, and Mrs. Haldane, knowing that opposition would give significance to her suspicions, had been obliged to consent to the plan. Besides, she told herself, Gordon was too selfish and too wary to be led into any-

thing serious. So she folded her hands and let matters take their course.

'Well,' Bessie smiled bewilderingly into his eyes, 'do you think that a local event of such tragic importance as a disappearance would be allowed to die out in a place like Belhaven? We have the whole story—how for weeks and weeks the country side searched for the body without success . . .' She stopped abruptly with an apologetic glance at him. 'I ought not to talk about it to you,' she said, frankly, 'but, it is very strange, you seem to be the only person in the place who has no curiosity about Mrs. Gordon's fate. I ought to be shy about discussing it with you, perhaps, but I am not.'

Gordon looked down at her with a strange hesitancy in his manner.

'I have no curiosity about it,' he said,

hoarsely. 'There is no doubt she destroyed herself in some way. The sea can keep its secrets.'

'But she had no motive for that, surely,' said Bessie, quickly.

Gorden's eyes were dark with some unexplained feeling. He still gazed at her in a curious indecision.

'I wonder if I could tell you,' he said, in a low, hoarse voice. 'You are older than Sybil, and you can judge; and you know more of the world——'

She met his look of appeal with frank sympathy.

'I should like you to tell me,' she said, simply.

'We—we were not happy,' he began, but Bessie's dilating eyes checked him. He drew himself up and assumed his indifferent manner. 'No, no, Miss Bessie,

I'll not shake your faith in human nature.'

'What's that about human nature?' Mrs. Haldane's croak intruded on the *tête-à-tête*. 'If anyone wants to know about human nature let him trace his motives to their source, and that will enlighten him. Human nature is man unclothed —only we are so civilized we can't even allude to nakedness of any sort. It's no wonder we are such shams when we masquerade in the nature provided by the tailor.—ready-made, with a discount for cash!'

This electric speech sent a current of life through the conversation, though it gave Miss Prue more embarrassment than vigour, and made Miss Prissie absorbed in Tupper. Mrs. Haldane had intended to break up Bessie's *tête-à-tête* by joining in the conversation, but at this moment Dr. Ruth-

erford crossed the room and seated himself by Gordon; so, seeing that their solitude was interrupted, she again breathed freely. The lady had made up her mind that Bessie should not forego the freedom she herself had renounced by her marriage; and in her daughter she hoped to see the development of those views she had had to quit when she became a wife and a mother.

Seeing that the doctor would spoil the confidences of the two, she turned her attention to Mr. Ladislaw while Sybil was deep in chat with the two Miss Dixons.

'Sybil dearie,' said Miss Prue, who had the romantic turn of mind, 'you will likely be settling down and thinking of marriage now your education's finished.'

'Toots!' said Miss Prissie, vigorously, 'she's but a lassie yet. It would be

more sensible-like for Sybil to ask if you have found a lad while she travelled.'

A faint colour brought back a wave of Miss Prue's vanished bloom.

'Sister,' she said, softly, 'it seems to me that any allusion to a love-affair that doesn't end in marriage is indelicate—not to say wanting in consideration.'

'Havers, sister! If that was so, all the women I ever met have been indelicate. Gracious me! what would women have to talk about if they only mentioned the love affairs that came to marriage. But that reminds me . . . Sybil, what's this I hear about you and the young doctor?'

Sybil looked up carelessly.

'I don't know.—What young doctor, Miss Prissie?'

'Ah, my dear! You are deep, but you'll not find me easy to take in. There's

only one young doctor in Belhaven. And a nice-like good creature he is! I met him this week at Sandy Millar's—Maggie is not keeping well. You might call for her, Sybil; and, if you do, take her a dish of broth, like a woman.'

'And some herbs, dearie, you'll mind o' them;' put in Miss Prue, anxiously. 'It is cheery-like to have a flower in the room when you're ailing;—a bit of mint or a sprig of rosemary.'

'Sybil,' Miss Prissie leaned forward and sank her voice to a confidential whisper: 'What are folk saying about your father in Dunbar? What does it mean?'

Sybil turned pale, then the colour rushed back to her face.

'Daddy!' she exclaimed. 'He is quite well. What—what have you heard?'

'Oh nothing, dearie;' said Miss Prissie,

laying her mittened hand soothingly on the girl's arm. 'It's all gossip, of course; people are so quick to talk.—You must just not notice it . . . This is very good tea, sister. Do you mix it, Sybil, or is it all green?'

Miss Prissie thought she had changed the topic very cleverly, but Miss Prue spoilt her efforts unconsciously.

'When I heard it, dearie, I said to sister, "The fairest rose may have a worm preying unseen——"'

'Yes,' interrupted Miss Prissie, 'and I told you I had heard the remark before. Wait now!—Sybil, have you been talking to your friend, Miss Haldane, about your mother?'

'No,' said Sybil, wide-eyed.

'I thought not! Sister and I called on them yesterday, and, though they had only

been here a few days, they had the whole story. I suppose they will be telling you what they heard, though your father always begged us not to talk to you about it. However, you are quite old enough to know now, and, since people are talking about it again, I may as well tell you——'

'But we don't believe it of your dear mother, Sybil,' interjected Miss Prue.

'Indeed we don't, dearie. Robert Gordon's wife would never have the bad taste to prefer another man to him.'

Sybil looked from one to the other perplexed

'I don't understand—' she began.

'No, dearie, of course you don't. It's not to be expected. You see, your mother was a beautiful woman, and greatly admired. And Mr. Ladislaw had an Englishman staying with him that was always at

the Towers, walking out with her, and being just very friendly. And people talked, as they will, especially in a place like Belhaven. You won't believe it, but they've actually talked about the minister courting me—and I'm sure he might do worse! Well, the Englishman went south the very day before she disappeared, and it was the common gossip that she had run off with him. But we didn't believe it, knowing the family so well. Still others did, and they said it was no use searching for her. However, the thing was talked about all over the country, and that was all that people could find to account for her disappearance. Sister always said she must have been caught by the tide and drowned—only they never found the body.'

'A strange pallor had crept over Sybil's

face during this story, and her heart rebelled against the necessity that she should know it. Was this shameful thing the true explanation of her mother's disappearance? The mother whom she had loved and mourned,—was she this thing that Miss Prissie had said? She was sick with sorrow and shame, and was glad when Mr. Ladislaw created a diversion by asking for a cup of tea.

By the time it was poured out the two ladies and he were deep in a discussion as to the relative merits for rheumatism of scarlet and white flannel.

It was a relief to Sybil to be silent, and with a cruel pain at her heart she drearily watched the trio; Mr. Ladislaw with his face puckered like a walnut-shell,—partly from a habit of taking snuff, partly as the result of his peculiarly dry humour; and

the ladies in their gowns of stiff silk and their China crêpe shawls, shaking their curls, and simpering girlishly as they talked.

They were very delicate and dainty looking, with a faint colour in their cheeks and an old-world flavour about their talk that Sybil loved. But to-day they had filled her with anger. How could they have told her that terrible story? And what was the explanation of its revival now at this late date? No wonder her father had been gloomy and sad with such a burden of sorrow to bear. He, at least, must hear nothing of this gossip. She glanced fondly at him. He was leaning back in his chair, his handsome face turned towards Bessie Haldane with a smile at her enjoyment of the story he had just been telling her and the doctor.

Dr. Rutherford's face was also set towards Bessie's, which had grown soft and wistful during the last hour, and he was in a mood to appreciate Gordon's humour; but for all that he rose to take leave.

'See what it is to be a doctor,' he grumbled, with a disconsolate glance towards Bessie. 'You ministers and bankers can disport yourself on Sabbath as well as any other day. But the hard-worked medical man has no Sabbath. People are as ill on that day as on any other.'

'I find that they are usually worse on Sabbath,—too ill to get to kirk,' said Mr. Ladislaw, drily, turning from Miss Prissie's aggressive argument at the first opportunity. 'There's Peter at the harbour now. He buried his wife last Tuesday, yet hadn't the decency to attend kirk the day, the old sinner!'

'I saw you at the funeral,' said Gordon, 'and 'pon my word you seemed to be enjoying it; at least, I thought so.'

'Did you now, did you?' said Mr. Ladislaw, giving a strained attention to his boot-tops. Then he glanced up suddenly and slily 'The fact is,' he said, with unexpected frankness, 'it took me all my time to keep a douce face at that funeral. I was walking back with Peter,—he's a kirk member, and it was cheerier for me to go along with him;—and I was giving a word of consolation about the virtues of his wife —poor woman! It was only between whiles I could get in a word, for Widdy Daughtry was behind greeting just awful, and Peter walked beside me dour-like, as was natural. It's a sair thing,'—Mr. Ladislaw's gravity was beautiful,—'for twa widdies to be thegither and for the ane

not to comfort the other,—however! . . . Peter walked beside me dour-like till we were to pass the Lorne, when I felt him give me a poke in the ribs. I looked up, and there stood that bonnie lass o' Sandy Millar's. "Eh!" says Peter, eagerly, in my ear. "Do you think Moggie wad mak the second to me?—eh? think you, wad she?" I was like to laugh out then and there.'

Gordon balanced a pinch of snuff between thumb and fore-finger.

'I'd like to see him make love to Maggie,' he said, smiling. 'I wonder what she would say to him!'

'She's not likely to say yea or nay to anyone for some time to come,' said Rutherford. 'She is in a low way—quite broken-hearted. Some love trouble, I suspect—I am just going to see her now, but

we can't do much in these neurotic cases.'

Gordon sprang up, surprising everyone by the sudden movement, and walked to the piano.

'We have had no music. Sybil, you might sing something before the doctor goes.'

'Yes, do, please!' Rutherford added his entreaties, and crossing the room turned over a book of songs. 'Won't you sing this, Miss Gordon?' he asked; and, as Sybil bent over the music, he said, in a low tone, 'I must come in during the week. I wish to see your father.'

'Why?' she asked, startled.

'He is not well. I don't like his looks; but I ought not to make you anxious . . . There you are!—"The Banks of Alan Water."'

The last words were pitched in a higher

key, the doctor being conscious that the whispered colloquy was provoking observation.

Certainly it was! And, while Gordon and Bessie watched the two suspiciously, the budding romance roused Miss Prue's sympathy, and stirred the memory of a long-dead grief.

In the hall afterwards, when Sybil was stooping to draw on her goloshes over her shoes for her, Miss Prue bent her head to whisper,

'I am just very glad to think you are so happy, dearie. There's no doubt he's a nice lad,—I can always trust a Robin . . . I was to have married one . . . . it was long ago . . . he died . . .'

The faded face was quivering, but at this moment Miss Prissie broke in with a vigorous last word to Mr. Ladislaw.

'And a love-story is a real treat to a woman, especially if it's a sad one;—it's the only thing some people have to make them interesting. The funny thing is that it's only the old maids that ever have love-stories; married women seem to go without:—that Miss Haldane will marry . . . .'

The sharp voice dropped, and through the open door Sybil could see her father bending over Bessie. But she could not hear his words:

'You must forget that I ever bothered you with my troubles.'

'But you didn't bother me. I am so sorry for you. Won't you finish telling me another day?'

'Oh, it doesn't matter. Besides, there's no place anywhere where we could be free from interruption,' he answered, with a shifty evasiveness in his glance.

Bessie was nervously pulling a flower to pieces. She gave him a quick, shy look, and then suggested timidly,

'The wainscoted room——'

He drew himself up with an ugly scowl.

'Any place but that!'

The harsh tones made her shrink back, and, observing the movement, he continued, with the old flashing smile,

'That is Elspeth's domain, we could not turn her out, you know.'

'Then there's nothing for it but to discover the secret chamber,' Bessie said, dolorously. 'Sybil says there is one in that room.'

There was a swift change of expression on his face—a vague alarm dominated by passion.

'Sybil told you that?—How much does she know?—What does she suspect?'

The imperious tones roused the girl's spirit, and, as Sybil came into the room, she looked at him with a proud vexation.

'Here she is,' she answered, coldly. 'You had better ask her yourself.'

CHAPTER IX.

UNDECEIVED.

> 'The end
> Is piteous, you may see, but much between
> Pleasant enough.'

As Sybil came slowly up the long room, Gordon threw himself into a chair and held out his hand to her; the smile on his face smoothing out the lines on brow and cheek that a moment before had made him look old and haggard.

She looked fondly at him, and allowed herself to be drawn within his arm, from which position she gazed at Bessie with a

slumbering defiance in her glance. Miss Prissie's words had made her uncomfortable, she could not tell why. It was not that she was jealous of Bessie, whose undisguised admiration of Gordon pleased her, and excused her own worship of him. But it seemed to her a disloyalty to the memory of her mother that her father should give occasion for any remark such as she had heard. 'That Miss Haldane will marry Robert Gordon.' Of course it was absurd! Was she not more to him than Bessie could ever be? And did not the uncertainty of her mother's fate forbid the idea of a second marriage?

She smoothed back the hair from his forehead, and looked down into his eyes.

'After all, you are a dear old daddy!' she exclaimed, 'and I am just very glad to think I am not going to leave you

again, nor the dear Towers with its beauty and its mystery. By the way, Bessie, was it you saying that the secret of all beauty is mystery?'

'Yes,' said Bessie, eagerly, rousing herself and giving Gordon a quick glance. 'We were talking about the wainscoted room, don't you know. You said you suspected it held a secret chamber, didn't you?'

'Yes; and I do think, daddy dear, we might get up a party, and have a right down good hunt for it. It would make the Towers far more interesting to know there was one.'

Gordon pinched her cheek with a laugh, interrupting the sentence.

'Nothing of the sort! I'll have no search-parties, or any attempts to pull the old place about. And as to secret chambers,

they are uncanny things, and I for one don't wish to know more about them than I do.'

'Well!' Bessie exclaimed, 'I have often heard of Scotch superstition, but I never realised till now what a hold it has on people. Do you know, Sybil, your father was really terrified when I told him you suspected there was a secret chamber in the wainscoted room?'

'Rubbish!' Sybil cried, gaily. 'He was only taking you in. You don't know what an old dissembler this daddy of mine is;—he would deceive even the recording angel, if he could—wouldn't you, dear?'

He shifted uneasily under her merry glance, yet answered in the same mocking tone;—

'I rather think I would! The pity is one can't.'

'I thought you were really frightened,' said Bessie, recovering her composure at the explanation. 'Are you truly such a pretender, Mr. Gordon? And was everything else you said intended as a joke?'

She looked keenly at him as she asked the question, and for an instant Gordon was uncertain what reply to make.

Her question offered a way of escape from the dilemma in which his impulsive confidence had placed him; and yet he was not willing to put an end to the fascinating intimacy with this piquant little woman of which he had laid the foundations. He had seen that Dr. Rutherford was attracted by Bessie; and, though love between them could only bring the girl trouble, he was too selfish to wish to see Dr. Rutherford in his place as her confidant and friend.

Bessie's admiration of Sybil's father had been evident to everyone; and though he broke the girl's heart, and worse, he was determined to keep it. His resolve shaped his answer.

'A joke!' he cried. 'Miss Bessie, surely you know me better than to suppose it possible that I could mislead *you!*'

He looked directly into her eyes, and the light came back to the girl's face. She turned away, and rose from her chair in a nervous fashion.

'Sybil dear, I must go now. I told mother I would overtake her before she got to the lodge gate. Will you come and have tea with me to-morrow?'

'I am afraid I can't,' said Sybil. 'I must go and see what is the matter with Maggie Millar.'

'Nonsense!' Gordon cried, sharply. 'I

will not allow you to run any risk of that sort. Give Sandy a bottle of wine and some grapes for her, but I don't wish you to go to the cottage. Do you hear, Sybil?'

She stooped and kissed him.

'I will promise not to run any risk; but, daddy, surely you would not have me keep away altogether? Don't you remember how good Maggie was to me when I was ill last spring?'

Gordon almost groaned. He had cause to remember that illness, and Maggie Millar's frequent visits to the Towers, of which Sybil had no suspicion. He would have forbidden her visit to Maggie if he had dared, but he feared to run the gauntlet of her surprised questions.

Besides, it was improbable that anything would come of Sybil's seeing the girl . . .

'If you go, you must not stay five minutes,' he said. 'There has been a case of scarlet fever at West Barns, and Rutherford doesn't know what is the matter with Maggie.'

'I'll be careful,' Sybil answered. Then she turned to Bessie—'Don't you wish, Bessie, that you had some one to look after you like that? You see what a tender old daddy he is!'

She gave him a close hug, and did not notice the extremely casual manner in which he accepted the caress. All his energies were going to the empressement he was putting into his farewell of Bessie Haldane, and for once he received Sybil's tenderness coldly.

Sybil did not forget the requests of Miss Prissie and Miss Prue the next day when she set out to visit Maggie, and her basket

contained flowers as well as dainties for the invalid.

Sandy's cottage was on the Dunbar Road, standing a little way back in a garden that was the admiration of Belhaven, and a certificate of Sandy's professional efficiency. Sybil lifted the sneck of the door and passed through the passage into the kitchen, where Dr. Rutherford was talking to his patient. He rose and set a chair for her, but she crossed to Maggie's side.

'I am very sorry to see you so ill, Maggie. What is the trouble?'

'My heid is sae sair,' Maggie moaned, 'and all yesterday I was fevered;—and, oh, Miss Sybil, could you gie me a drink?'

'Surely,' Sybil said; 'but I have some grapes here. Daddy said I was to bring you some;—could you take one, Maggie?'

'Not fra him! not fra him!' Maggie

screamed. Then at Sybil's astonished face she added ;—'Dinna mind what I say, Miss Sybil—I think whiles I'm no mysel'. I'll tak the grapes, if you please ; they're fine for the thirst.'

While she ate the fruit, the doctor turned to Sybil.

'I would rather you did not stay with my patient now. She has every symptom of scarlet fever. Will you allow me to walk back with you to the Towers ?'

'Certainly,' Sybil answered. 'I want you to tell me what you meant yesterday about daddy.'

They left the cottage together, as splendid a man and beautiful a woman as nature ever fashioned.

Sybil was in a peculiarly gracious and gentle mood, full of gratitude to Rutherford for his solicitude ; and she gave him an

attention that flattered the young man and made him forgetful of Bessie Haldane's saucy charm.

He looked at Sybil's slim figure and the graceful poise of her head, and yielded to her higher beauty; showing her a new and unconscious deference that she found very pleasant. She was full of anxiety for her father, but the doctor soothed her fears, and she left him in the drawing-room at last with a light heart.

As for Rutherford, he waited for his patient's entrance with triumphant elation.

Sybil had been kinder to him that day than she had ever been, and his heart had answered to her attraction as it had never done before; so he walked up and down the room with the air of one who, coming, has seen and conquered.

His thoughts were interrupted by Gor-

don's entrance, and the doctor's fears vanished as his host came forward. Gay, good-humoured, smiling, there was nothing in his appearance to arouse anxiety, and Rutherford's keen glance could detect nothing in his manner that accounted for his suspicions of the day before.

He threw himself into a chair with a disconcerted laugh.

'I may as well confess that I came here with the intention of catching a patient, but 'pon my word you don't look much like one!'

'What set you on that tack?' Gordon asked.

'Well, once or twice I have seen you look queer, and yesterday there was something about you I didn't like—but to-day you are as bright as Phœbus himself!'

'Of course! You doctors are always

finding patients in your friends—especially if their pockets are well-lined. I have no fancy for the professional eye to rest on me, but that's the penalty one pays for having a medical friend. What's the proverb?—you must expect to catch fleas if you lie down with the dog! I suppose Sybil has been talking to you?'

'Well,—yes!' the doctor admitted. 'Still, I would like to convince myself that you are quite sound. Allow me a minute.'

He listened at Gordon's heart, and then raised himself; and the smile had passed from his face.

'Well?' said Gordon, impatiently. 'Well?'

The doctor was silent; then he spoke, reluctantly.

'I don't wish to alarm you—but——'

'Go on, man! What are you halting

about? If a man is to be hanged, what is the use of the hangman apologising?'

He stopped abruptly; and Rutherford saw by the grey shadow on his face that in spite of his careless words he was alarmed.

'There is something uncanny in the thought of sudden death,' Gordon said, after a moment, in a deprecatory manner.

'But I am not saying you will die immediately,' the doctor broke in, quickly. 'You may live to be ninety, but I must tell you you may be taken any moment.'

Gordon knitted his brows.

'It's a curious thing,' he said, musingly, 'how fate dogs a man. If you are clever enough to evade man's laws, you can't get away from God's law. As we sow we must reap. It is not often I moralise,' he added, looking up with a winning smile; 'you may

take it as a sign that I have no conscience . . . . And you think there is something wrong with the heart?'

'I fear so—something radically wrong.'

'Ah, well!' Gordon sighed—'Sybil——'

'Don't be anxious about her!' Rutherford cried, eagerly. 'If anything should happen,—it would be my hope——'

Before he finished his sentence Gordon had taken his hand and was smiling encouragingly.

'My dear fellow, don't wait for anything to happen! You have nothing to fear as far as Sybil is concerned,—and she would make any man happy!'

The eagerness in his voice had the effect of subduing Rutherford's ardour. He was not yet quite ready to yield his bachelor freedom, and if there were no fear of losing Sybil he was in no haste to bind himself

irretrievably, He allowed the matter to rest there, and turned the conversation into the professional channel again. He found his patient quite willing to be prescribed for, and even over-anxious about himself: and finally he left the Towers unable to account for the contradictory phases of the banker's character.

Gordon turned back into the drawing-room, and as he entered Sybil sprang forward, put her hands on his shoulders, and gazed searchingly at him.

Then she laughed low.

'I do believe that doctor has been frightening us only for his own sake. There is nothing the matter with you, is there, dear? What did Dr. Rutherford say?'

She laid her cheek caressingly against his, and he threw his arm around her.

'Of course there is nothing the matter

with me! Rutherford was after other game. What do you think of him, Sybil? Would you have him if he asked you?'

She released herself and sprang away crimson and glowing.

'Daddy!—he hasn't——'

'No, no!' he said, with a laugh. 'How quick we are to come to conclusions. I said *if* he asked you.'

She hid her face on his shoulder out of range of his mocking eyes.

'If he hasn't asked me we needn't talk about it,' she whispered. 'And as long as I have my old daddy I shall never marry.'

'Toots! that is what you all say, you lassies, till the right man comes—then away you go. "Ah, I shall ne'er forget Robin Adair!" I warrant me Robin is the right man for you, Sybil!'

He hummed a bar of the song, and at the words Sybil's colour deepened and her heart beat quickly. Had she met the right man? Was there not 'Robin Adair' at whose call she would be willing to leave even her father?

'I believe,' she said, smiling while she reddened, 'I believe the right man will be a Robin.'

Then she covered her confusion by resting her face on his shoulder. Gordon bit his lips with an unexpected and curious jealousy, and his mood of the week before returned, surprising even himself by its recurrence.

He had eagerly encouraged Rutherford's love for Sybil, yet now, when she seemed likely to return it, he was full of jealous and contradictory vexation.

His loneliness and his failure confronted

him again. Sybil gone from him he would have nothing at home on which to lean. She brightened the house, supplied his need of companionship, flattered his self-esteem, and completed his life.

If her mother had lived, her marriage would not have disturbed him much;—he would still have had a graceful woman to give the touch of ornament necessary to his æsthetic needs.

He wished Sybil to remain with him, to worship him as before; and yet he loathed her presence and grasped at the hope of her marriage. Was it because her resemblance to her dead mother kept him from forgetting?

CHAPTER X.

LOVE.

'I am still a god—to thee.'

The next day Sybil went again to see Maggie. She was fond of the girl and was not afraid of infection, so there was no reason for her to stay away from the cottage.

She found Maggie alone, lying muttering and moaning in delirium, and she stood a while looking pitifully down at her.

By-and-by the words became coherent, and she started to hear her father's name

occurring over and over again. What was this she heard? Could her father, good and noble as she believed him to be, act so basely as to seek Maggie's love only to spurn it when given?

Sybil listened, hearing every detail of the story, and her face became white and stern as the meaning of the disjointed phrases became clear, and she saw that Gordon had in cruel thoughtlessness broken the girl's heart.

It was the first suggestion of dishonour that had touched him; but reluctant as she was to believe the story she knew he might carelessly have led Maggie to think his kindness to her meant more than it really did. She stooped over the bed.

'Maggie,' she cried, taking her hand, 'you don't know what you are saying, dear. You are quite mistaken. He never

meant you to love him—not in this way.'

A gleam of intelligence lighted up the girl's eyes, and she looked despairingly at Sybil.

'It's true, Miss Sybbie, it's true. He was aye guid to me, and when you were awa' he was aye wi' me, not likin' to be his lane; an' he wad come ben the hoose mony a day, an' he said I wad mak a bonnie little wifie to him, an' then, Miss Sybbie, an' then——'

'Yes?' said Sybil, hoarsely.

'When I loved the vera groond he trod on—he turned roond an' telt me gentlefolk didna wed wi' siccan as me . . . .'

'Oh, Maggie!'

'That was a', Miss Sybbie. He lauched an' won awa; an' noo my heart's broke, an' I'm prayin' to dee.'

The feeble voice ceased, and Sybil buried her face in the bedclothes that Maggie might not see its shame and sorrow; and so Dr. Rutherford came into the room unobserved.

He would have gone out again when he caught sight of Sybil; but he could not leave her face to face with danger, and he moved forward and touched her.

'Miss Gordon, you must come away at once. It is scarlet fever.'

She turned hastily and rose with an instinctive desire to keep secret the cause of her grief.

But a glance at his face showed her that he too was aware that her father had played with the girl, and having won her unsuspecting love had left her to break her heart over his falsity.

Happily he had done Maggie no greater

wrong than this. While Rutherford looked at Sybil, the expression of his face half-pitiful as he saw her trouble, half-cynical as he thought of its cause, she suddenly faced him with flashing eyes, and a proud passionate strength in her glance.

'I have come to stay here,' she said, leisurely drawing off her gloves. 'I will nurse her. She should not be left alone.'

'I can't allow it,' he said, quickly. 'The risk is too great.'

'I am not afraid,' she returned; her quiet tones contrasting oddly with his abruptness, 'I intend to stay.'

'But why should you?—why?' he began, and stopped.

Sybil's eyes fell and her cheeks were stained. She put out her hand, and steadied herself by a chair.

'I must,' she panted, 'I must. No one else ought to——'

'Hear what she is saying? Pooh! it is all delirium, a sick girl's fancy: we doctors never notice such things.'

'Then you don't believe it?—it is not true?' she cried, eagerly.

His eyes fell before her appealing glance.

'Well,—perhaps not! But even if it is true you should not let it trouble you too much. She is over-sensitive and——' He felt the impossibility of discussing the subject with her, and he took two or three turns up and down the room. 'Miss Gordon, you must go now. I will send a nurse.'

'No,' she said, hoarsely. 'While she is delirious I will stay. Oh, I could not bear any one else to know—to know——'

'And you mean to stop?'

She bent her head sadly.

'Suppose I told you that your place is beside your father? suppose I told you he might die any hour?'

She set her teeth, and her breath came fast a moment, then she faced him proudly.

Rutherford looking at her thought it might be worth a man's while to tame the spirit in such a woman.

'I owe Maggie something also,' she said. 'I can't leave her to die. And if others heard her.—Oh, I can't bear that anyone should blame him!'

He turned away furiously, but a half-sob drew him again to her side.

'You must go back—for my sake,' he said, tenderly.

'I must stay here, for his sake,' she returned, firmly.

Rutherford strode angrily from the room.

He knew he could not move her, but as he went down the road he laughed at the quixotic madness that to save Gordon's name from a little harmless gossip would lead his daughter to endanger her life. In his sight the banker was not much to blame. He had no doubt flirted with Maggie, and the girl who was excitable and ambitious was fretting as much over her shattered hopes as over her unrequited love. This no doubt would lessen her chances of recovery from the fever, but was Gordon to blame after all? The doctor shrugged his shoulders and dismissed the subject from his mind. But Sybil was miserable at finding the first flaw in her idol.

Meanwhile Gordon was walking on the shore accompanied by Bessie Haldane.

A white mist lay wrapped about the rocks and the waves, and the yellow sands of the summer time were sodden and grey. Along the beach great masses of brown sea-weed had been thrown up and left by the tide: and here and there a dank anemone oozed out its slow life beyond the wash of the waves.

Little fragile shells and pebbles embroidered the sand, and marked the place where the fringed waves had broken; and the damp air was heavy with the smell of brine and weed.

Bessie stopped in her walk and sniffed approvingly.

'I love the smell of the salt,' she said. 'And I am never tired of the sound of the waves. They seem to answer some question that I can never put into words,—some cry that I feel but can never utter.'

Gordon looked down at her, and stroked away the smile that spoiled the symmetry of his moustache.

'You are talking like Sybil,' he said. 'I don't want you to become mystical and dreamy and high-flown in your notions.'

She glanced up and smiled at the tender light in his face.

'There is no fear of that,' she answered. 'I shall never be so fine as Sybil,—I am nothing but a hungry, passionate woman!'

'Passionate, eh?'

'Yes, passionate! I don't care if it is unwomanly to talk like this. I don't care if it is unconventional! Oh, you don't know what we feel, we women! You think because I laugh, and flirt, and despise men, and wish to be independent that I am not like other women. I am! I am! and more, because I have hid my

nature even from myself, and it has grown strong by silence and repression. I know what other women feel who have to be dumb when their hearts are crying out; calm when their whole beings are in revolt; blind when the light is round them; paralysed when the movement of a finger would lay heaven at their feet! Why did you touch me the other day?—I was only flirting with you, I never meant anything more, and when you looked at me, and told me you had not been happy, you made me——'

Her voice broke into a sob, and Gordon stared at the sudden unveiling of the nature before him.

It was as if in a gallery of sculpture the marble had stepped down from its cold remoteness, living, palpitating flesh.

'And made you—what?' he asked,

taking her hand and passing it through his arm.

It lay on his sleeve like a little, fluttering bird, and he put his other hand tenderly over it.

'And made you what, Bessie?'

'You made me want to comfort you, and make up for what you had lost,' she cried, passionately. 'Don't mistake me, I am not in love with you as it is called—you are too selfish to rouse love—but you have made me feel what a woman can be to a man, and I want to be your friend and to help you!'

'Dear little Bessie!' he smiled, 'and so you think I am too selfish ever to win love. Selfish! Ah, you don't know how I have struggled against my love for you; —how I have said to myself, "You have no right to this sweet love;—you can't

satisfy her, you can't reveal your past to her. You have your child to live for. You must never put another love between yourself and Sybil."'

And as he said the words Gordon almost persuaded himself that he believed them, and he was more than half inclined to pity himself for the pathetic hopelessness of his lot.

Bessie looked at him with a bright colour coming and going on her cheeks. When he ceased speaking, she drew a long sighing breath.

'I don't want to know your past, I only want to help you now. I shall not come between Sybil and you—I love her too dearly for that. It will be enough if I can share your troubles and comfort you sometimes!'

Gordon looked across the sea to hide

the amusement in his eyes. When he turned once more to her, his face was grave.

'I have no right to accept such devotion; even if I were free to marry, I could not allow you to sacrifice yourself——'

She interrupted him with blazing eyes.

'Do you suppose that I am asking you to marry me? Haven't I told you I don't love you? Even if I could, I wouldn't bind you to love me;—I only value the gift that is free. What we hold lightly is more truly ours than the thing we grasp. Do you understand?'

She raised a lovely tremulous face to his, her eyes shining like flowers veiled in dew; and as he saw the force of the passion that resisted him his nature

leaped flushed and exulting to its conquest.

He gazed down at the red lips and soft eyes, pure and still for all the passionate words, and his glance lingered about them. They were worth the winning:—he had imperilled his soul for less!

And yet, so thinking, he paused to assure himself that he could not be so bad when a woman like Sybil loved him, and one like Bessie trusted him.

'Yes, I understand,' he said, looking deep into her eyes; and then he stooped till his breath was on her cheek.

She started from him shamed and indignant.

'One little kiss to seal our friendship,' he said, coaxingly.

'If it needed that seal it would not be

friendship,' she said; and turned and walked on unyielding.

She was the first woman who had ever repulsed him, and her refusal enhanced her value. He was quite unable to appreciate the motive that had prompted her offer of service, but he saw that it was not love demanding sweets of love, and he rated it at a value commensurate with its rarity.

The loneliness he had felt since Sybil's return again overcame him, and he kept a long silence.

'Don't you see that friendship is its own obligation?' Bessie at length asked, timidly.

'I thought you would not be bound?' he said, fiercely.

'No. I shall never be bound in the

way you mean. But we can go hand in hand.'

She gave him her hand, and like two children they walked back across the sands, the waves moaning all along the way.

Now and then Gordon looked at her and wondered at the beauty of her face. It was alight with a new charm of perfect satisfaction, and he would have given something to have kissed her smiling lips. But there was that about her which held him aloof till they parted.

He went back to the Towers eager to overcome her coyness and with real love growing in his heart.

Her refusal to let him kiss her had whipped his passion into life; and he said to himself that she was necessary to his

happiness, though he could not make her his wife?

But could he not? What was there to hinder? His union would be legal after all these years of widowhood:—what then stood in the way of his happiness?

He was passing the wainscoted room, and he paused at the door irresolute. It was nearly eighteen years since he had entered it, he had not been in since the day his wife had disappeared. Should he go in now? Should he make a final effort to break from the old dogging past that he might begin a new life with Bessie?

His hand was upon the handle of the door when suddenly he stopped to listen. What was that noise inside?

A trembling like an ague fit seized him. Then he turned and hurried down the long passage, and only breathed freely

again when he reached his own room. He walked to the mirror and looked scornfully at his white face.

'Coward, fool!' he exclaimed, and he paced the floor with restless impatience.

Then his mood calmed, and he went to the drawing-room.

'I will get Sybil to sing to me,' he said to himself.

But he did not find her in the room. She was weeping at the death-bed of the girl whose heart he had broken for the amusement of an idle hour.

CHAPTER XI.

SANDY'S LITTLE LASS.

'Yea, Death's a face that's fell to see;
But bitterer pang Life hoards for thee.'

'My lammie, I'm wae to win hame withoot you.'

Elspeth stood at the door of Sandy Millar's cottage on the last night of the year; and in the doorway stood Sybil, pale and worn and listless.

Snow had been falling all day, and the garden was covered with a white sheet

that glittered where the light of the lamp she held fell upon it. The night was windy, and she shivered in the storm when she answered the old woman.

'It's no use, Elspeth; I must stay here. Tell daddy I am taking care of myself, and as soon as Maggie is better I will go home.'

'Oh, my lammie! are you dacin' richt to bide sae lang fra him? Robert Gordon's no himsel' wantin' you; an' I doot that widdy will be gettin' a haud o' him.'

'Elspeth,' said Sybil, wearily, 'if you are going to talk you must come inside. I am cold.'

'Are you speerin' gin I hae ony mair to say?' asked Elspeth, losing her temper. 'Ay, have I, my wumman! I wadna cast up a fault to yon puir lassie that will sune be awa'; but is't the pairt o' a young

leddy to be tendin' her when she has but an old mon an' a bit callant o' a doctor beside her? An' what wad Robert Gordon say gin he kenned she was fevered? It's unco bad to tak tent o' a lassie that's afflicted i' her body, but it's waur when the min' is wrang. You'll be takkin' the fever yoursel'——'

'No, no, Elspeth, don't be afraid. Maggie will not need me much longer. Go home, and don't worry. I may be able to leave to-morrow.'

She stooped and kissed Elspeth, drawing up her shawl over her head, and pinning it closely about her; and the stern old face softened.

'You would gar a body sell her soul to the deil,' she mumbled. 'Will you no come hame for the New Year?'

'No, nursie. And besides, daddy does not really need me.'

'I'm no to say that. He's awfu' dour these days, an' sair angert at you bidin' wi' Maggie. No, no, he doesna miss you, wi' the English widdy there to crack wi', an' her lassie to walk wi'. She's juist a crookit mannie, that Bessie;—a laddie a' but the breeks! An' she's framin' weel to turn Robert Gordon's heid wi' her mad ways.'

Sybil sighed at the words, and her face was dark while she watched the old woman totter down the path to the gate. She turned then to go into the room where Maggie lay between life and death; but before she reached the door the bells of Dunbar town-house rang out, and she took up a shawl and went into the garden to listen to them.

It was only a year ago since she and her father had stood listening to the bells ringing in the New Year, and now a breach wider than time could measure separated them. Her faith in him had been assailed by his selfish treatment of the poor girl who had trusted him.

Sybil had heard the whole truth. She had no room left for doubt of Maggie's story. It was clear enough that her father had made love to her, flirted deliberately, and then left her to break her heart for him. He had done this while Sybil was abroad, and the girl strove to excuse him, saying loneliness had driven him to seek Maggie's society. Some women would have exonerated him altogether. Maggie was dying of fever, and the disease accounted for her state; but Sybil and the doctor knew that

a broken heart was the real cause of the girl's malady, and Sybil felt his baseness too keenly readily to forgive him.

She had believed him so true, so noble; and now her pride in him was gone, and with it her faith in his goodness.

As she stood looking out into the midnight, the bells ceased clanging, and a great silence settled over the snow-covered country. It seemed to her like a symbol of her life,—silence and darkness and death before her for ever.

She had lost faith in man. The temple of her soul had been desecrated, and the god himself lay there a shattered thing of clay.

A sob rose in her throat, but she choked it down, for at the garden gate a man's figure had paused, and she knew that it was the doctor.

He came striding up the path, and touched her arm.

'Go in,' he said, peremptorily. 'It is madness to be standing out in the snow. I did not think you would be so unwise.'

He opened the cottage door, and as she passed in he followed, shaking the snow from his boots.

The sight of Sybil's face, pale in the light, touched him, and he spoke in a gentler voice.

'They say it's luck for a dark man to go into a house first at the New Year; I'm sure I hope it's true. How is she now?'

'She is lying quite still, and is conscious. Sandy is sitting beside her.'

'Ah, poor fellow! Well, I'll see if I can do any more for her.'

He passed into the inner room, and Sybil let him go in alone. During the last days

she had been aware of a subtle change in Rutherford's manner, and she was doing her best to avoid him.

His reverent delicacy, which had lightened her task in their sick-room association, was giving way to a more personal and intimate feeling, which he was at no pains to conceal from her.

She had laid aside her dignity and reserve for her father's sake, and had been invested instead with the white garments of an angel's purity, and Rutherford was powerfully drawn towards her.

She had attracted him at first by her wealth and beauty. Now, so far as he was capable of affection, he loved her for the noble woman that she was; and he set himself seriously to win her.

'She is resting quietly,' he said to Sandy, after a glance at his patient. 'The

fever is away. She may get over it, now we have only weakness to fight against. Come, come, Sandy, keep your pecker up.'

The old man shook his head.

'I'm prayin' that my little lass suld dee,' he said, hopelessly. 'Gin she lives, there's naught for her but a sair heart—an' mebbe waur. I wad hae her dee ere she cam to wrang;—an' what hope is there for a lass wha sets her love on gentlefolk?'

'But yourself,—you will be lonely without a woman in the house to look after you,' said the doctor, awkwardly, wondering at Sandy's rude stoicism.

'Better be lonesome than shamed!' the old man cried fiercely.

Then he rose up, his face working.

'Eh, mon! nane kens hoo prood I were

of her:—hoo I tended her, an' worked for her syne she was a wee toddle on the floor. She was like a bit flooer, the wee maid; sae fresh, an' sweet, an' bonnie. An' you couldna hae thocht pain wad come by her, I loved an' keppit her sae weel .... The meenister cam in by the day, an' made a prayer beside her, but I stoppit him. It wasna ony use talkin' that gait. The A'michty took the maid's mither, an' tho' I gave her love o' both feyther an' mither, it wasna eneuch for her .... There's never muckle hope for a lassie that's bonnie gin she has nae mither; but I thocht likely the A'michty wad fence her in wi' the auld mon's love. Toots! it were nae use, He couldna dae it .... She's my ane lambie, but I wadna ask for her to live the noo. I'm prayin' she micht win awa'.'

He stopped and laughed hoarsely, clapping his hands together with a hard glitter in his little eyes.

'Mon! it maks me lauch to think it's me prayin' that my little lass suld dee.'

He sat down again; his head sunk on his breast, and the doctor seeing him felt a choking sensation in his throat. But he had not found the solution of the great problems of love and sorrow and sin, and he had no comfort to give. It was a relief to go out of the room to Sybil.

He looked searchingly at her.

'Are you taking care of yourself? Had you a walk to-day?' he asked, brusquely.

'Yes,' she said, wearily. 'I went along the sands after the storm. There has been a wreck,—perhaps, you know. A

great noble vessel almost in port. She was bound for Skye and struck on the rocks last night, mistaking the May lights for the Bell Rock. Doesn't it seem a terrible thing—that force that drives ships and men and women to mistakes that lead them to destruction. We think the light of faith is before us, and it guides us to despair. We sail towards love, and are dashed on the rocks . . . .'

Her voice broke and he gazed pityingly at her.

'It is a terrible thing,' he said. 'Some teach that there is a power that out of wreck and ruin can evolve beauty and order; but how are we to believe that? For instance, what will that poor girl in there do with her disappointed life?' Sybil turned away her head that he should

not see her quivering face, and the doctor continued. 'She has nothing to live for; and her poor old father sits praying that death may take from him the only thing he loves. I tell you what, Miss Gordon, it is a rotten world, and human-nature can never rise from the mud!'

He went from the house, leaving Sybil sunk in hopeless misery, weeping wildly at the evil and sorrow for which no remedy could be found.

She was roused at last by the sound of voices in the other room.

'Na, na, lassie, gin it's Robert Gordon he'll hae to dae wi' me. Gin you're guid eneuch to coort, you're guid eneuch to merry wi'. An' what mair wad he be wantin' than a bonnie lass like you? I'll hae the law on him, I will!—the proud-hearted villain!'

'Feyther, no, no!' Maggie's gasping voice answered. 'You dinna ken. He did me no wrang; an' wha could help lovin' him? It wasna his fault that I suld love him. Feyther, I'll dee gin you're hard on him. He was aye guid to me, an' I was fine an' happy a' through the summer. He's no fause; I wearit him juist. He telt me sae ane nicht i' the gairden. Do you no' min' o't? the nicht you an' Elspeth saucht the ghaist?'

'Ay, I min' it weel,' said Sandy, grimly. 'An' was't your foot vera sma' an' vera neat that I fand amang the flooers?'

'Ay,' Maggie said. 'An' I'd dee vera weel content gin I kenned I'd meet him—efter. Feyther, promise . . . .'

Her voice failed, and while she gasped for breath Sybil sprang into the room and lifted her head to her bosom.

'Pit her doon!' Sandy cried, fiercely. 'You're Robert Gordon's lass. I'll no' lat you touch my little maid.'

He rose and reached out his hand threateningly to Sybil, but Maggie caught it and held it while Sybil looked up with tears streaming down her face.

'Sandy,' she said, humbly, 'let me stop. I love her too.'

'Yes, yes!' Maggie cried, 'she'll stap . . . . An' you maun forgive him . . . Promise . . . ere I dee . . . .'

Sandy wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

'I canna . . . he wranged my little maid.'

'Na, na, feyther. He did me no wrang . . . I swear to you . . . Promise you'll no leave him . . . till he's guid . . . You can dae it.'

'Na,' he said, roughly, 'I couldna keep trouble fra my little lass . . . I winna forgie the mon that's brocht it . . . .'

Maggie raised herself on Sybil's breast, and crushed his hand in her weak fingers.

'I'm to dee, feyther,' she gasped. 'Promise . . . you'll no leave . . . him . . . till . . . he's . . . savit.'

Sandy looked at the drawn face of his child contrasting with Sybil's bending over her, and his heart swelled with bitterness. Why should the one be sent to an early grave while the daughter of the man who had sent her there lived to become a happy wife?

While he thought, Sybil stooped and kissed Maggie's forehead, and at the sight his bitterness gave way.

Maggie's eyes were fixed on his and her fingers gripped his hand.

'Feyther, I love him. I wad fain see him again.'

'It's ower late, lassie. I hae prayed that my little maid suld dee, and noo I'm like to see the answer.'

'Tell me . . . you forgie . . . him.'

Her tones were very feeble now, and the grasp of her fingers was relaxing. Sandy drew himself up sternly.

'Gin ane prayer is answerit the A'michty might hear the ither,' he said. 'My little maid . . .' he bent over her tenderly, and a faint glimmer returned to Maggie's dimming eyes. 'My little maid, I'll forgie him. An' I mak you that promise. I'll no leave him, I'll no cease praying for him till his sowl is wi' its Makker.'

A faint light, settling into the peace of death, broke like a pale dawn on Maggie's face, and lightened the rugged features of

the old man. If Dr. Rutherford had been there even he must have felt the nobility of human-nature that could reach that height of love and forgiveness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MORAL STETHOSCOPE.

'The individual in each breast
Is tyrannous to sunder them.'

'I HAVE just come from Millar's,' Dr. Rutherford said the next day, meeting Gordon in the High Street. 'That girl of his died last night. I have sent Miss Gordon home, you will find her at the Towers when you go back.'

'Has she taken the fever?' Gordon asked, quickly.

'No; but she is completely worn out.

And, by the way, you don't look up to much yourself.'

He shot a keen glance at the banker, who met his gaze unblushingly, and merely shrugged his shoulders in answer to the remark.

'I wonder if he has a conscience?' Rutherford thought. 'It would be a nice experiment to use the moral stethoscope on a subject like this.'

'Of course you know Miss Gordon is not out of danger of infection yet,' he said, aloud. 'And I must say it surprised me that you consented to her running the risk.'

'I had nothing to do with it. Sybil is the most determined woman I know. She decided to go—and went.'

Again Rutherford looked keenly at Gordon, and again his eye was met with all the

ease and indifference of a man who had nothing to conceal.

''Pon my word you are a cool hand!' the doctor said to himself, not without some admiration for Gordon's self-control, and at the same time wondering that a woman of Sybil's strength should have imperilled her health to save such a man from the gossip he had provoked.

'I suppose you knew Millar's girl?' he said, carelessly.

'Yes. Her father has been gardener at the Towers from time immemorial. He will miss Maggie. She was pretty enough, as girls go.'

'I'd like to have you under a stout whip,' thought Rutherford, setting his teeth viciously.

Not that he blamed Gordon as much as Sybil did;—if girls will break their hearts

over men, they have themselves to thank! —but because he could not overthrow the banker's composure.

Meanwhile, Gordon was gazing at him from under his closed lids wondering how much Rutherford and Sybil had heard of his 'little affair' with Maggie.

He knew well enough that he had gone further than was prudent with the girl, and that Sybil would take the gravest view of his share in causing her death.

Had Maggie revealed anything, or was he still the ideal man, the soul of truth and honour, Sybil believed him to be? He did not acknowledge even to himself how necessary her love was to him, and how, now that he was likely to miss it, he dreaded losing the worship he had always received from her.

He left Rutherford in one of his gloomi-

est moods, and his brow was lined and seamed with care when he thought of Sybil. He dreaded her reception of him, and the evening's *tête-à-tête;* and he determined to invite Macdonald to the Towers for that night.

'Sybil is home again,' he said to Alec, a little later. 'Come and dine with us, if you are not afraid of infection.'

'Afraid? No!'

Alec laughed aloud, thinking it would take considerably more than fear of infection to keep him from Sybil's side.

He had not seen her since the night he had walked home under the stars to dream of 'my little girl Sybil;' but he had been constantly at the Towers, and in her home atmosphere he had been consoled for her absence.

And he was to dine with her that night!

He lived through the day with a curious elation in his bearing, and he had continually to check a fatuous inclination to burst into song. Sitting with gloomy eyes in his office, Gordon heard the young fellow whistling merrily over his book of dry statistics, and he sighed heavily. What power could restore to him his vanished youth and cheerful buoyancy?

Yet there was no dejection in his bearing when he afterwards passed through Macdonald's office.

'Better drive down to Belhaven with me this evening,' he said to Alec.

'Thanks, I will,' he replied, bending over his work to hide the light he could not keep from his eyes.

As it happened, Sybil was not alone when they arrived. Bessie Haldane had heard from the doctor of her return, and had hurried down to the Towers.

She found Sybil on the sofa looking pale and weary, and she seated herself on a low stool beside her and gazed anxiously into her face.

'You are quite worn out,' Bessie said, stroking her face fondly. 'Poor dear! Was Maggie really so much to you?'

'No,' said Sybil, huskily. 'But I don't want to talk about her, Bessie,—it is all so sad. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing to get so rosy and plump?'

'I have been happy,' said Bessie, looking down and playing nervously with the fringe of an antimacassar.

Then she glanced brightly at Sybil, and drew a long breath.

'Oh, Sybil! You don't know what it is to be necessary to some one. I am so happy all day, so satisfied! You will not believe it, but I actually listen patiently to mother's theories, and I even submit to drinking her decoctions!'

Sybil smiled a pale, sad smile.

'Ah, Bessie! so you are a woman after all!'

'If being a woman means being lost in another, being utterly content, having the whole world and an eternity of happiness in my heart—then I am a woman, Sybil!'

A brilliant colour was on her dark face and her eyes were radiant with happiness. Poor Sybil, seeing the joy, felt a dumb hunger at her heart.

'And who has given you all this, Bessie?'

Bessie bent her hot cheek till it rested on Sybil's white face.

'You will not be vexed?' she whispered. 'Oh, Sybil, I know what you are to him—but I couldn't help it! I didn't want to take your place, but he is so splendid, and——'

Sybil sprang up and gazed wildly at Bessie.

'What do you mean?—who?' she stammered. 'Does he care for you—Alec?'

Bessie gave a low, happy laugh.

'Alec?—no, indeed!' she pouted. 'Do you think I could care for a commonplace man like that?—No! I mean some one quite different!'

'Daddy!' Sybil said to herself, sinking back on her pillow relieved and shocked at the same time.

What new trouble was this? Was it right that, with the uncertainty respecting her mother's fate, Gordon should think of marrying again?

What was she to do? Bessie must not be allowed to wreck her happiness as Maggie had done. She must gain time to think. If she could only go away with him for a time!

While she hesitated, she heard his step in the hall, and Bessie sprang to her feet.

'I can't stay now, Sybil. I don't want to meet any one. Good-bye, darling. Don't say I was here.'

She kissed Sybil, and escaped by the one door while Gordon and Alec entered by the other.

Sybil's heart beat fast. How could she give her idol the old worship? And yet how could she omit it without showing

that he had fallen from his place in her esteem? She had forgiven him his part in causing Maggie's death, but she was too grievously disappointed in him to meet him with the old adoration.

She rose from the couch white and trembling, while Gordon came forward, his brows knit, his mouth set in its most sombre mood.

As she saw him, Sybil only remembered that he had suffered, and bore the marks of his long sorrow; and she rushed forward and threw her arms round him, with a passionate cry. Her reception relieved him immensely. The old tender light came into his eyes, and he smiled gaily.

'I don't know that I ought to kiss you, when you have been so disobedient, eh, Sybil? What should I have done if you had fallen ill?'

At the words Sybil looked up, her eyes streaming.

'Oh, daddy—don't you know? Maggie is dead!'

She had not seen Alec, who walked away to the window.

'I know, I know,' said Gordon, soothingly, patting her back. 'We'll not talk about it. I know the story—she took a fancy to me, poor girl. No one would say I was to blame for that, eh? What are you looking at me so for?'

Sybil was gazing into his face with a directness that disconcerted him, and he added, quickly,

'But you have not spoken to your guest. Macdonald, where are you? Sybil, we'll drop the subject of Maggie.'

He spoke the last words in an undertone, his eyes shifting uneasily under her

glance; but he saw her face take on a look almost of loathing. She released herself from his arms, and he knew that she shared Maggie's secret.

Happily Alec had responded to Gordon's call, and, as Sybil turned from her father's guilty face, she met Alec's eyes gazing at her with a look she could not fail to understand. With a deep sob she laid her hand in his, and her eyes sought his in a passionate appeal for help. Her glance set his heart beating wildly, and while they stood together, feeling the thrill of that close clasp, each knew that the other loved.

Sybil was the first to recover herself, and she withdrew her hand with a poor little attempt at a smile on her white lips.

'You have nearly killed yourself!' said

Alec, impetuously. 'You are quite faint! Let me put you on the sofa—see!'

He drew her hand within his arm, and led her to the sofa, and Sybil leaned back against the cushions in a manner that alarmed the two men. Gordon's conscience was speaking for once, and he dared not touch her. So he stood helplessly looking on while Alec knelt and rubbed her hands until she opened her eyes. He found his task pleasant, and kept on rubbing even when Sybil had revived sufficiently to smile her thanks. Gordon, hovering near, found with a curious jealousy that he had no share in her gratitude.

'I tell you what,' said Alec, suddenly looking up. 'You are awfully upset by this nursing, and you want a change. Do let me persuade you to go and live beside

my mother at Auchinblae. It is the very place for an invalid, and my mother would be overjoyed to have you.'

He ventured to enforce his plea by the least little pressure of the hand he held, and Sybil's colour came back under his eager eyes.

'Would you like it, Sybil?' Gordon asked, hesitatingly, uncertain how she would treat his question.

At the suggestion, Sybil saw a way out of her difficulty with regard to Bessie. Her heart yearned towards Alec's mother and a woman's sympathy, and she said, wistfully, 'Yes, I should like it, daddy —if you would come with me.'

The reply made Gordon radiant. She still loved him, then! She wished to be with him as before! She would still idolise him!

'Of course I'll go with my poor, sick lassie. Would the manse take us both in, Macdonald?'

'Half-a-dozen of you!' Alec replied, gaily; pleased beyond measure that Sybil was willing to accept his mother's hospitality. 'I'll wire to tell them you are going, and you must start to-morrow.'

'That will do, then!' said Gordon, jauntily.

His penitent mood was a thing of the past. He was saying to himself his fault could not have been so great if Sybil could so easily forgive it!

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE MANSE.

'The day is dark and the night
To him that would search their heart.'

In the summer, the manse at Auchinblae is one of the prettiest places possible, and even in the desolate winter it is not without its charm. It stands on the slope of a hill looking across an undulating country, with stern granite peaks piercing the clouds, and heather-covered summits leaning over the clustered houses.

The village is a long street, sloping up

from the noisy little burn that turns the mill at the foot of the kirk, to the hill-top where the road wanders away through a lovely glen to the wild and desolate moor-land of Glen-Saugh.

It is a place where people live and die and are not forgotten; for the village annals are chiefly those of birth and death, and the rushing life of the cities has not swept over the broad channels of human interests.

Here flowers are friends, and every tree has a tongue understood by the villagers. In the manse garden, bare and desolate as it is, every plant has a history; and Sybil likes to wander about it, and gaze at the tree that was planted when Alec was born. It is a Scotch fir, and stands at the head of the path in solitary state; and the minister tells humorously (with a touch of pathos in the humour) how this path, shadowed by

trees planted 'as the children came,' was to have been called the bairns' avenue.

'But you see, my dear, we never had but the one laddie, so there is no avenue. Still we are very proud of our solitary fir.'

Sybil's eyes were full of sympathy when she heard the little story, and she longed to tell Alec's father how she too shared his pride in the life the tree represented. But the time had not come yet, and she could only think to herself of the new love that had been given to her, just when the old love had failed her.

She knew that Alec loved her, though no more had passed between them than the look and the clasp that had revealed so much; and the knowledge helped her to bear the strain of the new relations between her father and herself.

It was almost pitiful to see Gordon's efforts to reinstate himself in her favour; and he laid himself out to please her, and consulted her wishes on every point, in a manner that touched Sybil, and made her almost eager to forgive him.

Maggie's name had not been mentioned again between them, but Gordon knew he had fallen from his high estate, and self-love made him use every art to regain his old position in her favour. She had no wish now to hold aloof from him, but she could not be altogether at ease with him, and if it had not been for their stay at the manse each would have felt the constraint of their intercourse to be unbearable.

Gordon had expected to be very much bored by this visit. He had only gone to Auchinblae to please Sybil, and had intended to beat a retreat after the first day;

but there was good shooting to be had round about, and his day lengthened into four.

The quiet life was just what Sybil needed, and it rested her as nothing else had done.

She fell in love with Mrs. Macdonald at once, and the old lady, who had heard the story of her motherless childhood, opened her heart and took the girl in as soon as she saw her.

The mother's keen eyes had spied out her boy's interest in Sybil, and it did not take her long to discover that nothing interested the girl so much as stories about Alec.

The minister's wife was a good walker; and, her skirts held high, she would trip along by Sybil's side telling endless stories of her laddie; while the minister, who had

fallen a victim to Gordon's fascinations, followed with her father.

Sometimes Mrs. Macdonald would lead the talk round to the pride of the village, St. Palladius, whose ruined chapel was the delight of local archæologists; but she saw that the saint had no power to lift the cloud from the girl's face, nor to banish the sadness that made her eyes pathetic, and she would soon recur to the topic Alec.

She liked to hear Sybil laugh when she told her 'the laddie was unco bad to rear,' and was often doomed to spend Sunday in the ingle-nook with James's 'Anxious Enquirer,' instead of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' or the 'Illustrated Bible;' and her dim eyes would glow with pride when Sybil told her how heroic had been his conduct on board the *Psyche*.

'I would sooner he had been drowned than have saved himself when there were women and bairns in peril,' she said, with the spirit of a Roman matron.

One evening after they had lingered over tea, with its new scones, rich cream, and heather honey, until they were all demoralised and could only sit talking in the gloaming, Sybil threw herself down beside the old lady and sat staring into the red embers of the peat-fire. From his chair on the other side of the chimney-place, Gordon watched her furtively, wishing he could read her thoughts, and know exactly how he stood with her.

This desire to recover her affection astonished even himself. It put Bessie Haldane in the background, and made everything insignificant beside the wish to regain her adoration.

And yet he struggled against the weakness that made her admiration necessary to him, for she flashed a light on his past which showed him still blacker depths of evil than she could even imagine.

If this thing that he had done could cause her such pain, what would she feel when she knew that her own mother had, by his hand——

He checked the thought. For eighteen years he had grappled with it, till it lay in the background of his consciousness a mangled heap—and now it was sheer weakness that made him wish to drag it again to the front. It was impossible that Sybil should ever make the discovery; —he was safe, and no mortal on earth could prove his guilt.

He lit a cigar with a jaunty air, and proposed to the minister that they should

go into the garden to watch the sunset; and, while Mr. Macdonald walked up and down moralising wisely, Gordon listened with his pleasant smile and heartily concurred in his views.

He even deceived himself into a belief that he could not be so bad when he could enter into the minister's ethical ideas.

'What makes you so quiet to-night, dearie?' said Mrs. Macdonald, stroking Sybil's hair fondly, and bending down to peer into her eyes.

'I don't know,' said Sybil. 'I was thinking.'

'And I was thinking too, but my thoughts made me glad, for they were of my laddie.'

'You are very proud of him?' said Sybil, with a wistful ring in her voice,

remembering her vanished pride in her father.

'Proud? Yes, dearie, he is the crown of our old age, and I would sooner lay him in the kirk-yard to-morrow than have a shadow of dishonour on his name.'

'Don't say that—don't!' said Sybil, wildly. 'You never know! you can't tell! We have such pride and faith in those we love, and then—something happens—and we find out our mistake, and know that no one is—true.'

'Sybil dearie, you are too young to talk so bitterly. God keep you from knowing what that is. But there is no fear,—with a father like yours. Mr. Macdonald and I are delighted with him, so open he is, and frank. I don't wonder you are proud of him;—and some day there will be another——'

The old lady paused, for Sybil had hidden her face in her lap to hide her pain at the reference to her father.

She knew he was not all they believed him to be; yet his crime was not so great that she should go through the world branding her father as a hypocrite. Was she not, perhaps, taking too serious a view of a fault into which he had been led by his very kindliness?

Yet she could not imagine her father, with his fits of moroseness and stormy gloom, winning the love of a girl like Maggie, had he not set himself deliberately to do it. The sunny smile and pleasant manner with which he cloaked his sadness must have been assumed before Maggie could have been won; and Sybil knew him well enough to be certain that he must have had some design in laying aside his

natural manner for the sake of one in Maggie's position. But the whole affair was wrapped in a mystery she had now no hope of penetrating.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Macdonald went on talking half to herself,

'No, we cannot lose our boy. Too many prayers rest on his head for him ever to go far wrong.'

Sybil looked up suddenly, and dashed the tears from her eyes.

'But if he did! If he did! What should you do?'

'I think, dear, his father would die. But I should only love him the more. Yes, I would only love him the more,—and that is as good as praying for him. But I am not afraid,' she continued, brightly, 'he'll do well, my lad! And he will marry a wife whose name is as stain-

less as his own, and the Macdonalds will hold up their heads as they have ever done.'

'But he may care for a girl whose name is not stainless,' said Sybil, hoarsely, remembering the story of shame that made her blush now whenever she thought of her mother. 'The girl he—cares for may be good, and yet belong to—to those that have done wrong. I have heard, haven't you?—of—of family troubles that—that no one ever mentions, yet the girls—of the house have been—good.'

Sybil's shaking voice ceased, and the old lady lifted her head.

'That is not the kind for my Alec!' she said, proudly. 'He must marry where there has never been reproach. He will not break my heart by linking his name with dishonour. Even though she was

good—as good and sweet as you are, my dear—he would have to give her up for his mother's sake.'

The words fell on Sybil's ears like the knell of doom. She had never thought that anything could come between her love and Alec's. She had been utterly certain of him, and now his own mother stood between them. She would have to give him up; she must not bring disgrace on his stainless name. Oh, if she had never heard that shameful story of her mother's supposed flight!—if only Miss Dixon had left her to her belief in a blameless parentage!

A long silence fell between the two women, and then Sybil rose unsteadily, and in the firelight her face was like that of one dead. She crawled away like some wounded creature to her room, and through

the night lay sleepless in an anguish worse than death, and hopeless with all the hopelessness of youth.

It was a relief the next morning to find that an expedition had been planned that would take her away from Mrs. Macdonald's anxious eyes for most of the day.

She and her father were to meet a keeper some way up the glen, and to explore the wild moorland around Glen-Saugh, and she welcomed the opportunity of asking him about her mother's fate. He might, possibly, be able to tell her something that would make the sacrifice she contemplated unnecessary. Their way led through Drumtochty glen, and when they reached the part of the road overshadowed by trees Sybil plucked up courage and began.

'Daddy, I want you to tell me all you know of my mother's death.'

Gordon was suddenly brought up in his swinging walk, and he turned a face pale with emotion, or anger, towards Sybil.

'What—what makes you ask?' he questioned, hoarsely.

The girl had not looked at him as she spoke, but now she turned a crimson face to him.

'It was—Miss Prissie. She said—she spoke of Mr. Ladislaw's friend. Daddy, tell me she died naturally. Tell me there was—no wrong—no dishonour in her disappearance.'

The strained entreaty in her voice made Gordon shiver.

There was a long pause, in which he hastily went over Sybil's possible reasons for introducing the subject.

'What makes you ask me now?' he said again, with a dark scowl. 'Don't you

know I never——. How—how dare you, Sybil!'

Sybil had never seen her father so roused, and she shrank from him, but her own happiness was at stake, and she answered, bravely,

'Daddy, I *must* know. I'll never ask you again. Did she die—disappear—because of—of Mr. Ladislaw's friend?'

'If you must know—yes! d—— you!'

Sybil fell back from the oath as from a blow, and stared blankly at Gordon, who took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead before he turned again to her.

'I beg your pardon, Sybil. You should know there are some things a man can't talk about. Never mention your mother to me again, and now let us forget all this.'

They had entered a narrow gorge whose

sides, covered with black heather-stalks and bare trees, rose steep and sheer to the skies.

A stream thundered through the ravine, and its waters lay black and forbidding in dark pools, or were churned into dirty foam by the rocks. Here the keeper was waiting them, and his presence relieved the constraint that had succeeded Gordon's words. His 'yes' had sealed Sybil's doom, and she shivered as she entered the dank, chill gorge. The keeper looked at her with a friendly eye.

'Ay, missie, it's an eerie spat, an' a lonely. We're miles from any house, and have need to ca' canny. In the summer I slept out all night, and it was fine with the smell of the heather, and the stars shining, but it's no' bonnie just now.'

'What made you stay out?' Gordon asked, resuming his pleasant manner.

'I was after an eagle. The eyrie is on yon crag; you might see it if you could climb above that boulder.'

'How far is it? I have a mind to try,' Gordon said, quickly.

'It's not so far, but it's not worth the trying. The rocks are awful slippery, and the banks soft with rain. Wait till the summer, and then——'

'Nonsense! Who knows if I shall live till the summer? I'll have a look at the nest now.'

'It does not look safe, daddy; don't venture!' Sybil cried.

He smiled at her anxious voice.

'See how soon I'll be there;' and he began clambering up the rock.

The ascent looked much easier than it was, yet Gordon mounted lightly and quickly.

They watched him from below till it was painful to look up, and Sybil seated herself to ponder over her own trouble. Gordon's answer to her question, short as it was, had been enough to tell her she must give up Alec's love. He must not break his mother's heart by linking his name with a girl whose antecedents were such as hers. If he spoke to her, as she believed he would, she must refuse him.

Her thoughts had led her so far when a cry overhead made her spring up with fast-beating heart. There was an answering shout from the keeper, and she closed her eyes as a horrible crashing sound told her what had occurred.

An instant after, her father lay still and motionless at her feet.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEARSOME VIGIL.

> 'As some temple seemed
> My soul, where nought is changed and incense rolls
> Around the altar, only God is gone.'

'He's not dead!' cried Macfarren; and at the words Sybil opened her eyes, and stooped over her father.

His heart was beating, and the horrible fear that had seized her relaxed its hold. She raised her white face to the keeper.

'Yes, he is alive. Go for help at once; we may save him yet.'

The man gazed uncertainly at her.

'It's an awful business,' he said, wiping

his face with his coat-sleeve. To be sure we must have help, but I canna leave you, and you couldna find the road by yourself.'

It was quite true. Sybil cast a despairing glance round, and saw the difficulty of the position. The short winter day was already closing in. There was never much light in the gorge, and now the shadows had gathered and night was almost upon them. Could she remain in such a place, alone, during the hours that must elapse before help could reach her?

She hesitated an instant, then her courage returned.

'You *must* go. Don't waste a moment. I am not afraid.'

'I'll not do it, missie. It wouldna be safe,' Macfarren answered.

'Yes, yes, you must. Oh, do go quickly. See, I will keep the dog with me. He knows me, and will stop.'

'Ay, that will do.'

The keeper's face cleared at the suggestion. He bade Chief lie still and watch, and then he hurried away down the gorge.

Sybil turned again to her father, and lifted his head on her knee. He was still unconscious, lying without a sign of life, and after a time she could not even detect the fluttering heart-beat.

A sharp pang passed through her. Was he going to die? An hour before she had shrunk from him, startled at his oath, and full of a vague suspicion for which she could not account. She had not recognised her father in the infuriated man, and had resented his manner to her. But now all

that was over. She forget that he had caused Maggie's death,—the estrangement of the past month,—her disappointment in him. She only remembered that he was her hero, her idol,—and he was dying! But he must not die! She had lost Alec, and now she could not lose her father as well. What if he had been selfish and weak? Frailty was human, and what was she that she should condemn him?

In an agony of remorseful love, she cried to God to spare him to her.

And now the dusk gathered deeper. Night closed in, and the river in the silence thundered with a maddening roar. And yet she heard other sounds distinctly, and the snapping of a twig, the flight of a bird filled her with wild terror. She even screamed aloud when Chief laid his cold nose on her hand.

Then her courage returned, and she summoned to her aid all her heroism. She was a brave girl, and if she had only known that her father was alive she would not have found it so terrible to sit there, cold and dark and lonely though it was.

Gordon was motionless. She rubbed his hands, but no warmth returned to them, and his head seemed to become colder and heavier every moment.

Would help never reach them?

Her teeth were chattering, and she shivered in every limb. The dog sat up, howling, and the sound intensified the horrors of the darkness.

She was not usually nervous, but her watch the previous night had rendered her weak and unstrung, and she was unfitted for the ordeal of this lonely vigil.

If she had been able to think calmly,

she must been impressed by the contrast between her feelings on the two nights.

Twenty-four hours had not passed, and the bitterness of her renunciation of Alec had been forgotten in this new fear for her father. It would have been an easy thing now to give up Alec, if by doing so she might purchase Gordon's life, and bring him back from the dead.

How the time dragged! How she longed for a human voice to break the silence! At last she could bear it no longer, and in a quavering voice she began to sing.

She had hardly sung a bar, when a shout stopped her song and filled her with new terror.

It was pitch dark, she could see nothing, and the voice was one she did not recognise!

She threw her arms round her father, and crouched down hiding her face, while the dog filled the night with his furious barking.

The sound gave her courage to raise her head and listen; and then her heart bounded and she shouted in return, for it was her name that was being called up and down the gorge.

'Miss Gordon! Sybil! Sybil!'

At her cry some one came stumbling and crashing over the stones, a dark form loomed near, and Alec held her close.

'Thank God! I have found you. My little girl, Sybil!'

'Daddy! daddy!' she sobbed, releasing herself the instant after; and Alec stooped, and by the light of a match saw Gordon lying white and cold in the terrible stillness that had alarmed Sybil.

He took off his overcoat and wrapped it round the insensible man, and without a word fell to chafing the numb limbs, while Sybil sobbed with relief. She did not pause to wonder at his appearance; she only knew that he had arrived when she most needed him.

'Courage, darling!' Alec said, after a while, 'he is coming round, I can feel his pulse. Macfarren will soon be here now; I started out to meet you in the glen, and heard of the accident from him. He went on to Auchinblae for help, and I came up the gorge seeking you; but I must have missed my way, for I have been wandering about for hours. Your voice led me to you at last.'

'I was afraid of the silence,—it was less lonely singing,' Sybil explained.

'Poor child! It must have been

terrible. But you had Chief with you,—good old dog!—you were quite safe. He wouldn't have let a stranger come near you. And now—you are not afraid of me.'

His voice was dangerously low and tender, but before Sybil could reply lights were flashing about the gorge, and eager shouts told her the keeper had returned with help.

They gave her food and spirits, and she was able to walk to the high-road where a carriage was standing; but when she arrived at the manse she only waited to hear that her father's injuries were not fatal, and then, the tension being relaxed, she fainted in Alec's arms.

It must be confessed that Alec enjoyed the hour that followed more than any that he had passed in Sybil's presence. His

mother was in Gordon's room with the doctor, and the minister was in the village looking for a nurse, so the care of his beloved devolved on the young fellow.

How tenderly he chafed her cold fingers, and how his hand caressed the tumbled hair, and lingered about the beautiful white forehead.

He laid her on the sofa, and knelt beside her, helplessly trying impossible remedies; and when she became conscious—the result of nature's skill rather than his—he was full of admiration of the genius which had directed him to the proper treatment.

Yet, looking back afterwards on the episode, he could only remember the moment when, feeling horribly guilty, he had rested his cheek on hers and felt her breath on his face.

There is no knowing what would have

happened when Sybil opened her eyes and he saw the crimson rise to her cheek; but just then Mrs. Macdonald bustled into the room.

'Sybil ill?—my dear child! Alec, what has happened?'

Alec sprang to his feet blushing furiously.

'She fainted, mother dear. I have just brought her round.'

His mother gave him a keen look.

'It seems like it!' she said, drily. 'And with that bottle, eh?'

Alec looked at the bottle in his hand, and burst into a roar of laughter.

'Adam's furniture cream!' he cried. 'By Jove! But there was a fine smell of ammonia, or varnish, or turpentine about it, and I couldn't find the smelling-salts.'

'Goose!' said his mother, scornfully, cross-

ing to Sybil's side. 'My poor dear, you are quite wearied out; and that lad of mine has been doing his best to kill you.' (She looked proudly at him as he spoke.) 'You must get to bed at once, dearie. The best nurse in the parish is with your father, and you are not needed. The fine creature! His first thoughts were for you. "Sybil, Sybil," he cried, coming to himself, "I didn't mean to kill you, but I was too late to save you." I told him to be easy; that you were all right, but he seemed not to understand. "I meant Sybil," he said, "my wife, Sybil."'

Sybil winced at the allusion to her mother, and her voice shook as she answered—

'It was mamma he meant. Something happened—a quarrel just before—he lost her.. He never forgave himself.'

'Ah, that was sad. He would feel it, so tender-hearted as he is. And now, Sybil, you don't look able to walk upstairs. Suppose you let Alec carry you to your room?'

'No, no, I can walk quite well,' Sybil protested.

'Walk! Why, you can't stand! Take her in your arms, Alec,—see how she is trembling.'

In truth, Alec was willing enough to take Sybil in his arms, but he was a practical Scotchman. She was no light weight, and the steps were steep and long.

He had no fancy for a task he could not accomplish well, and he liked the *tête-à-tête* with Sybil too much to wish to close it, so he glanced comically at his mother.

'Ask me to carry you up, mother, and

I'll do it; but I fancy Miss Gordon would be too much even for me. After she has rested a while longer, we'll see what can be done.'

He was very proud of his little strategy, but Sybil spoiled all by rising.

'I am quite able to walk. I would rather go up now.'

She leaned on his arm going up the long flight, and smiled gratefully when he put her into a large chair. But when he held her hand, she saw a new expression on his face that terrified her, and she made a gesture of dismay.

'Please don't—please don't!' she cried.

Alec's face fell for a second, and then a sunny light broke over it again.

'Well, I won't—not to-night. But you will have to hear me, my darling,—soon.'

He gave her a tender, satisfied look that showed how perfectly he understood her, and how certain he was of her love, and it almost broke Sybil's heart.

He was going to tell her he loved her; and she, what could she tell him when she loved him with her whole soul, and yet must refuse the love he offered?

CHAPTER XV.

EVERYTHING IS OVER.

'Thy hope that a breath dispels.'

The next day was Sunday. Alec had run over unexpectedly the previous night to spend the day at the manse, Sybil being the attraction; but Gordon's accident bade fair to spoil his holiday, so far as the girl was concerned.

Fate, however, was kind to him. Seeing Sybil's white face, worn by the agony through which she had been passing, the doctor refused to allow her to enter Gor-

don's room. He was sleeping and doing well, and her presence would avail nothing for either of them.

So Sybil went with the minister to the little church on the hill, leaving Mrs. Macdonald at home. She was very tired and miserable, and it was soothing to find herself in the manse pew, with its high boards and faded cushions, on which more than one generation of Macdonalds had knelt. She seated herself and looked wearily round.

The kirk was dim, and quite odorous with mint and bunches of herb that reminded her of Miss Prue; and the slow, quaint singing with which the service opened was like the music of another world. Before her was a tablet on the wall, but she could not read the faded lettering. Her eye moved listlessly along

the walls, until just over the manse pew it was arrested by another tablet and a long list of names. She could read these, and she went through the splendid succession with a bitter pain at her heart. Here was the record of the unstained name of the Macdonalds'—heroes, warriors, statesmen, brave and true;—few houses could boast such a glorious ancestry as was enshrined in the modest archives of the highland kirk.

Sybil's heart sank; how could she ally her name and shame with that unsullied record? She closed her eyes, and when she opened them again Alec was in the pew beside her, with a mischievous triumph on his face, and a look that said he had detected her in napping. Chief was lying at his feet, evidently quite at home in church, and the presence of the dog les-

sened Sybil's nervous dread of the man she loved. Oh, it was cruel that she might give no answering smile, that she should have to sit there white and still and cold, when life might have gone so joyously with her!

Alec watched her anxiously, wondering that he had no skill to dispel the sadness in her eyes, or to call the light to her face. But he said to himself she was utterly weary; and his gay confidence returned, for in a few hours she would forget her weariness in his love. It was not conceit that made him so certain of her. She had revealed her affection for him by that one glance, and his trust in her love was so great that he would have ventured his life on it.

Neither listened much to the sermon; Alec was riotous with glad anticipation,

Sybil paralysed by her pain and the knowledge of the pain she was to give. Her soul was full of bitter revolt against her lot, and the desperate anguish tore her heart.

Suddenly, above the storm and stress of her nature, the minister's voice sounded. He had reached his peroration, and the simple words of a grand hope were echoing through the stillness of the little kirk.

'What does the future hold for man? Not defeat, but victory! Not the sword, but the palm! Not loneliness, but home! Not a dead creed, but a living Christ! Not death, but life! Not a cold fate, but a loving God!'

The tears rolled heavily down her cheek, and Alec turned away his eyes, thinking she was weeping for her father. He drew her hand under his arm with a tender reverence afterwards, when they

stood outside in the kirkyard, but Sybil shrank from going back with him alone.

'Let us wait for your father,' she said.

'He's going up the glen to see a sick child,' Alec answered; and she turned reluctantly towards the manse.

At first there was no opportunity for the *tête-à-tête* she dreaded. Everyone came crowding round Alec to speak with him, and she could not help feeling proud as she saw how popular he was.

He had a pleasant word for all, and his hearty voice rang out in a broad Scotch that sounded cheerily in Sybil's ear, as he gave a kind word to one or cracked a joke with another.

'Ech, sirs, but yon's a fine couple!' said an old woman as they passed, and he turned, with a beaming face, to ask after her health.

'Poor old Sallie! she has been to kirk quite regularly since what she calls "congregation-of-the-lungs" nearly took her off last spring. She has a fine discernment, though—don't you think so?'

He looked down wickedly at Sybil, and the colour came into her pale cheeks. It was terrible to her to see his high spirits, and to know that she had to disappoint him, and she wished now to hasten the painful interview. Anything would be better than encouraging him in his unfounded joy.

She raised her eyes to his, and the pain in them checked the laugh on his lips.

'Sybil, what is it?' he cried.

'It is this,' she said, passionately. 'I know what you want, I can't pretend not to understand; and it is useless, I can't give it you! I mustn't let you love me!'

'And why not?' he asked, simply.

'Oh, I can't—I can't! Isn't that enough?'

'No, it is not enough. I love you with all my heart, and I have a right to know why I am to cease loving you. Do you mean that you can't love me?'

'No, no—not that. But I mustn't! I mustn't! Don't ask me any more. We can only be friends, nothing else.'

'Rubbish!' he said, masterfully. 'Look here, Sybil—it is strange to be calling you Sybil, but, you know, I always think of you as "my little girl Sybil!"—see here, dear, we can afford to be quite honest with each other. I have loved you since the first hour we met, and lately I have hoped you loved me.—No, I am not going to disguise anything, lately I have *known* you cared for me. Don't be offended, dear,

and don't think me over-bold. I know so little about women and their ways, but I trusted you . . . and now . . . . Oh, my little girl Sybil, what *do* you mean ?'

At the last words his confident tones failed, and a sudden fear sounded in his voice. Sybil dared not meet his pleading eyes, and she set her face sternly against the mad entreaties of her heart to tell him all—to let him overrule her decision.

But she thought of his mother, of her proud spirit and boast in her stainless honour. She thought of the scrolled names that vaunted themselves in the church, and she contrasted her own history with theirs. Her mother had disappeared, and scandal had been busy with her name. Even her own father believed in the guilt of his wife, and she could

secure her happiness only by bringing that dark story to light.

Could she publish her mother's shame? And had not Mrs. Macdonald said that, however good the girl whom Alec loved, he must give her up if her name were not blameless?

'I mean,' she said, steadying her voice as she accepted her fate, 'that everything is over. You must never speak to me again about—in this way. And by-and-by you will find some one else, and be quite —happy.'

'Make your mind easy on that score,' he said, bitterly, for it was hard to be repulsed after his certainty; 'I shall never marry anyone else.'

He walked beside her gloomily for a few yards, and then he stopped and faced her.

'I can't understand it,' he said, 'and, though I may be a fool for my pains, I can't help trusting you. A man doesn't love a woman like you half-heartedly, and my whole life is yours whatever you may do with it:—My past, for I never looked at a girl till I met you; my present, because you wake the best in me; my future, because some day I know I shall claim you.'

His simple manliness touched her to the quick, and her eyes filled with tears.

As he saw her emotion, he seized her hand, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes.

'Sybil, listen. You have some quixotic notion in your head, but don't think I am deceived. I am not over-confident, God knows, but that night at the Towers your soul met mine, and for good or evil

you are mine for ever. You can't prevent my loving and serving you . . . I shall say no more about this . . . I am not the man to force a woman's love . . . You will tell me you love me one of these days . . . In the meantime, I can wait; for the future holds "not defeat, but victory; not death, but life; not loneliness, but love!"'

He turned abruptly and left her, and with a terrible ache at her heart she entered the garden and went slowly up the path till she reached the lonely fir. There she paused and looked with dazed eyes across the valley to the hills.

It had rained while they were in church, and the summits were wreathed with mist. In the garden everything was damp and sodden, and the smell of decaying leaves and wet mould took the place

of the perfume of mint and herbs that had followed her from the kirk.

She stood pressing her hand to her heart, filled with pain because the best of life had gone by her, because the deep springs of her nature must never well up in the love of husband and child. Yet life was not altogether empty,—she still had her father; and she remembered with a curious pity for herself how last night it had seemed an easier thing to give up Alec than to lose him, and now . . . .

But she loved him yet;—not with the old worship, that could never be; but with the love that, seeing human frailty, still remembers the 'pulses of nobleness and aches of shame' with which it alternates.

She was roused from her reverie by a voice. It was Mrs. Macdonald, a plaid over

her white hair, taking the brisk constitutional no weather ever caused her to omit.

'All your lane, lassie?' she said, briskly. 'Did you not stay to talk with the folk?'

'We spoke to an old woman,—Sallie I think they called her.'

'Ah, did you? She is a character, Sallie. She came to me a while since begging for her "deid claes," and I gave her a night-gown I had beside me. "Weel, Sallie," I said the next time I met her, "and how does the gownie fit?" "Fine, mem," says she, "savin' that it's ower lang for me to walk in." "Toots, woman!" said I, "I hope to goodness you'll never do that."'

The minister's wife chuckled over her story, and presently went on,

'Sallie is very superstitious. She has

just come in with some eerie story or another of a dead man sitting up in his coffin. You should go into the kitchen and hear her. Marget, the old heathen, is firing scones, though it's the Sabbath,—but with sickness in the house I cannot say much. You look cold, dearie, go in beside them and get warm.'

'I must go to daddy,' Sybil said.

'No, no, he's sleeping, and nurse is with him. It will amuse you to hear Sallie.'

Sybil turned slowly towards the kitchen, and as she passed the open window she looked in.

The peat-fire was burning brightly on the wide hearth framed in by great smoke-blackened beams, and in the ingle-nook Sallie sat holding out her skinny hands to the warmth, her eyes glittering in the firelight. The rest of the kitchen was in

shadow, but the bright covers on the wall blinked like eyes in the darkness.

There was a fragrant smell from the cakes Marget was firing on the girdle, and when Sallie rose and spread out her hands, and horror slowly crept over Marget's face, Sybil pushed the door open and went in to hear the story.

'Yes, mem,' Sallie was saying, 'Peg an' her mon stayed oot bye on the fells, an' he deid quite sudden. She, puir buddy, daurna leave the corp his lane, an' yet was feart to stap beside him.'

'Oot on her for a coward-like wife!' Marget interrupted.

'Ay, mem, you may weel say't. An' a' the day an' a' the nicht she lookit ower the muir, but ne'er a buddy came by. An' she didna min' o' the door, an' cam in wi'oot stookin' it, an' the corp——'

'Guid save us, the deid canna rest wi' a door half-stookit!' ejaculated Marget.

'Mem, you're richt,' Sallie said, impressively. 'I had it fra Peg's ain mou—the corp sat up i' his srood,—he wasna coffined—an' thar sat preenin' while she mindit and shut-to the door!'

'Deil take you an' your corp!' exclaimed Marget. 'I hae burnt my cakes mindin' o' your stories!'

She stooped again over the fire, and, with a choking sensation in her throat, Sybil fled to the parlour. Mrs. Macdonald stared at the girl's ghastly face.

'My puir lammie! has Sallie frightened you?'

'No,' Sybil gasped, 'but—oh! it was awful! I saw it all as she said, only the man was daddy, and he was sitting up in his shroud in a coffin!'

Without another word Mrs. Macdonald walked to the sideboard and poured out a glass of whisky and water.

'Drink this,' she said. 'I am a homœopath, for I always cure bad spirits by good ones.'

The old lady was delighted with her poor little joke, and Sybil tried to smile in sympathy.

But, a few months after, the vision she had seen that day was a horrid reality.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUMMER MORNING.

'This feast day of the sun.'

'How pretty it is!' Bessie exclaimed, looking across the bay to the islands that gleamed like silver in the blue waters.

The herring-boats were returning home, a dainty fleet with sails silver white or golden brown where the sun touched them.

The tide was in, dashing over the rocks with surge and sparkle of foam that made one forget the heat and glare of the summer noon.

On the higher rocks people were sitting or climbing, and children playing,—the summer visitors from Edinburgh and inland towns,—and the pool where the women bathed was gay with maidens, some in scarlet costumes making dashes of colour in the scene.

Sybil and Bessie were standing on the winding path above the pool, having walked from Belhaven by the cliffs, and in the bright sunshine the change that had come over them since the winter was clearly marked.

Sybil's dark face had become thin and angular, and her eyes were pathetic with a dumb patience; but there was a new power in her appearance—the strength of a noble passion working on that which was within, the force of a fine endurance touching that which was without.

And in truth she had need of endurance. Since her visit to Auchinblae an estrangement had gradually taken place between herself and her father that, following on her renunciation of Alec, had been very hard to bear.

Gordon had become reserved in his relations with her. He treated her with a furtive suspicion, and isolated himself from her sympathy and affection.

She had explained his attitude on the ground of remorse for his treatment of Maggie, but as time went on she saw that this view of his conduct was untenable. Remorse does not make a man light-hearted and careless; and Gordon was no longer morose, and subject to the fits of gloom that in the old days had made him moody and irritable. He had become casual in his manner; and a shallow

brilliancy and gay insouciance ruled his relationships with everyone he met.

It was otherwise with Sybil, to whom he was sometimes hardly courteous, and she had had to learn that the father who had been her ideal of manhood was made of common clay. The discovery would have embittered a smaller soul, but it only sweetened her, and developed the beauty of her womanhood.

She herself did not know it, but the strong, sweet compassionateness which now penetrated her love for her father was a higher and more beautiful thing than had ever been her girlish absorption, or the old childish adoration.

It was, perhaps, the necessity of guarding the affection that still existed between them that made Sybil blind to the meaning of Gordon's changed manner.

Conscious that she had set another man in the place he had once occupied, she blamed herself for the coolness between them, and never dreamed that her father might have found some one to replace her in his affections.

She had no suspicions that he looked upon Bessie Haldane in any light but that of her friend. Bessie had told her it was impossible that her admiration of Gordon should deepen into any other feeling; and taking into account the disparity of years, and the circumstances of her mother's fate, Sybil believed her, and fearlessly continued her intimacy with the Haldanes. As for Gordon, he was attracted by Bessie, and piqued by her attitude towards himself into serious pursuit of her.

He was now bent on forgetting his old past, and on enjoying the present. The

future he left alone. He was careful that Sybil should not guess the footing of intimacy on which he and Bessie stood, and so summer came and saw the relations of all still unchanged. Whatever difference existed was in themselves,—Gordon had not quite recovered from his accident; Sybil had become a woman in face and feeling; and Bessie's eyes held a secret that made her more radiant and piquant than ever.

Her eyes were full of laughter as she turned from the bathers to Sybil.

'Sybil, there's a curious lack of humour about you Scotch people. Just imagine the two Miss Dixons solemnly bathing every morning, with their genteel ways and elegancies all drowned in sea-water like their curls! And nobody sees the fun of it! Like the man Mr. Ladislaw was telling about yesterday.'

'What man?'

'A Scotchman, Dawveed Broon.—By the way, you can't tell what a shock it gave me to discover the familiar Brown so disguised!—Well, a year ago Mr. Ladislaw made a joke that fell flat against Dawveed's obtuseness. He didn't smile forgivingly, or turn the conversation, or look superior, or do anything that people do when they hear a joke. He just maintained his natural stolidity. But last week, at his aunt's funeral, he suddenly saw the point, and burst into a laugh—"burrrst oot rroarrin' and laughin'," according to Mr. Ladislaw—and so offended his uncle that he has struck him out of his will.'

'Bessie, when you have lived longer in Scotland, you won't believe all that the ministers tell you.'

Bessie shrugged her shoulders in a little foreign fashion she affected.

'Do you think I believe them now? Oh, Sybil, your density is as deplorable as that of your countrymen! But you seem to accept all that one particular minister tells you. It was too funny to see Mr. Ladislaw last night devoting himself to you in his very unclerical fashion. He quite cut out Dr. Rutherford,—whose courtship is extremely medicinal,—and even Mr. Macdonald, whose attentions are dry enough to be statistical.'

With the last name she shot a sly glance at Sybil, and was delighted to see her colour deepen. She had her own suspicions as to the girl's fancy for Alec, but the two were cautious, and did not betray themselves to her bright, inquisitive eyes.

Sybil's manner was casual in the extreme when she answered,

'Bessie, you are a goose! Mr. Ladislaw is as old as daddy!'

'Oh, and is your father too old to marry again?'

Sybil turned sharply on Bessie's conscious face.

'Bessie! what do you mean?'

The girl made a little *moue*.

'Oh, don't be so frightened, Sybil. Haven't I told you before I am in no danger of marrying your father?'

'Yes, I know; and yet—you seemed to mean something just now.'

'I meant nothing, child, so don't distress yourself about me. Look here, Sybil,' she continued, hotly, 'I know you—and mother and everybody—think I am only a silly girl, but I am not; and I have my own ideas that I mean to stick to. I don't believe in marriage for a woman. She is then sworn to every sacrifice that, when made freely, is the blossom and fruit of love. I'd

rather be anything, giving my best because love demands it, than be a wife whose every service is forced from her by law. There! I know I shall shock you, but there is truth somewhere in the idea.'

'No, you are looking at it wrongly; there is no servitude, but freedom, in the bonds we clasp for ourselves.'

'Ah, now you are talking sentiment; and your eyes have a look in them I see sometimes when you are talking to Alec Macdonald. I am awfully disappointed in him. On the *Psyche* he was a hero; but in ordinary life he is a very commonplace youth, with a pen behind his ear, and a face like a blank cheque.'

'We must be heroic ourselves before we can recognise the hero in the commonplace,' said Sybil, shortly. 'It doesn't need very keen insight to see him when

some great deed labels him heroic. I prefer a commonplace hero. He is more suited to every-day needs; and if he falls it is not from so high a pedestal.'

'Sybil, how bitterly you speak! almost as though Alec had disappointed you. Frankly, he has quite disappointed me. He is not even handsome. When I choose my hero, I shall have one like Dr. Rutherford or—or your father!'

'In nine cases out of ten the moustache makes the hero,' said Sybil, drily . . . . 'What were you doing so long watching Miss Prissie and Miss Prue?'

'I was trying to find out which was the more amusing. They were playing whist with your father and Mr. Ladislaw, and it was killing to see Miss Prue drop her eyes and simper, "Hearts are trumps." But Miss Prissie stirred her up. "At your

age you shouldn't make such mistakes, sister. Don't you see diamonds are trumps?" They are a lovely pair, with their airs and daintinesses, their mittens and herbal conversations; and they quite overthrow mother's conceptions of human nature, they are so simple-minded. Miss Prissie gave me a recipe for lumbago, and Miss Prue one for pot-pourri, because I examined their hands. They have the greatest faith in my palmistry. Oh, Sybil, did you hear me tell Mr. Ladislaw he was to marry a widow with a daughter named Bessie?'

'No,' Sybil laughed.

The idea of the minister's marrying Mrs. Haldane was too absurd.

'I did!' Bessie declared. 'And he believed it, and avoided mother for the rest of the evening. I said it to pay her out

for scolding me, and it quite put an end to her talk with Mr. Ladislaw.'

Sybil could not help laughing again. Bessie was so bright that she always made her forget her troubles, and see things from the humorous stand-point. The colour came back to her cheeks as they walked on, and her eyes sparkled as they had not done since the day when she had told Alec everything was over. She looked her old bright self. And Dr. Rutherford, meeting her a few minutes later, stared at her brilliant cheeks and flashing eyes, and then turned to walk with them towards the harbour.

It is sad to confess that during the last few months the doctor's interest in Sybil had waned. She had touched his best nature when she nursed Maggie in the cottage; but the feeling had only been

transitory, and her return from Auchinblae a pale, sad-eyed girl had given the death-blow to his matrimonial plans. Besides, his self-love suffered when he saw that she too had lost her interest in him. She never now blushed at his coming, or gave him the quickly-averted glance that had once fed the flame of his ardour, and she no longer was charmingly shy and self-conscious in his presence. Added to this, her high spirits and beauty were gone, and he had no lasting admiration for anything but pink and white. It would have disgusted him had he been taxed with fickleness. To himself he justified the withdrawal of his attentions by saying he could not enter a family to which clung that disreputable scandal of a wife's elopement. His profession had given him a large faith in heredity.

But that day, meeting Sybil with the breeze blowing little curls all about a face alive with laughter, he wondered if she had lost all attraction for him. His heart beat a trifle more quickly, and he took her hand with a pleased look on his handsome face.

'May I give you the welcome I have just had from one of my patients, Miss Gordon?—"Guid save's! but ye're a sicht for sair e'e the day!"'

'She might have added in your case, with a remedy for them,' said Sybil, gaily, looking as though she cared nothing for his undisguised admiration.

And then, because the day was so bright and everything so beautiful, and it was, after all, pleasant to meet the doctor again, her face broke into smiles and she turned her eyes kindly towards him.

He responded to the challenge with a triumphant glance, and a renewed consciousness that Sybil was the one woman in the world for him. Beautiful, rich, young, adoring,—what more could any man ask?

He accepted his fate as became a philosopher, and a somewhat needy practitioner to whom a banking account is not without the highest charm.

'And what do you think of Dunbar in its summer dress, Miss Haldane?' he asked.

Bessie threw one of her saucy glances at him.

'I like it;—it is lovely; the prettiest little quaint place possible. But the people are so immovable; the men are sombre, the girls quiet, the young men—what do you call it?—douce. I want to

stir them up, to shock them, to see if they can look amused. Their stagnation is positively criminal.'

'You southerners are too vigorous to be quite reliable. Is to be amused with difficulty a crime? Even your own Englishman takes his pleasure sadly.'

'But that is better than taking it snuffily, as the Scotch do!' Bessie retorted. 'You are all asleep. You fought away your energies long ago, and now nothing rouses you but the bawbee. Even your ministers have no life, and are only the husks of a decayed system.'

'Oh, now, Bessie,' Sybil interposed, 'if you talk like that you will end by marrying a minister, and finding your intellect refined down to——'

'To a snore in church!' Bessie finished the sentence, scornfully. 'A sibyl indeed!

If I thought you had the gift of prophecy I would take the next train back to town.'

She swung her parasol lazily, and then looked up to meet Rutherford's eyes regarding her critically.

'So you wouldn't marry a minister, Miss Haldane? Does your decision apply to all Scotchmen?'

She glanced defiantly at him, then her eyes wavered, and a sudden blush darkened her face. She put up her parasol affecting a composure she did not feel, and fell behind the other two; while the doctor looked in Sybil's face with wicked eyes that took pleasure in Bessie's discomfiture. She forced herself to smile in response to his glance; and just when it was evident that there was a good understanding between them who should come down the path but the two Miss Dixons!

They were as usual dressed alike, their skirts gracefully festooned over wide crinolines, white crape shawls draped on their shoulders. Their bonnets were gay with lilac blossom and lace veils, and their whole appearance denoted a late spring. In one hand each balanced a heavily-flounced parasol; in the other Miss Prissie carried a book of sermons, Miss Prue Pollock's 'Course of Time.'

When they saw Dr. Rutherford and Sybil they exchanged glances.

'We shall have to give them a wedding-present, sister,' said Miss Prissie. 'I wonder, now, would Sybil like a sewed chair?'

'Or a group of wax-fruit under a glass shade, sister,' suggested Miss Prue. 'They should have something very handsome, being such a personable couple. Dr. Rutherford always reminds me—though

of course he is not so good-looking—of——'

It was evident Miss Prissie was not listening. Miss Prue sighed and finished the sentence in thought only.

They stopped and spoke to the young people, and, after the two groups had separated, Bessie ran back to ask Miss Prissie some question or other. So it happened that, when Robert Gordon and Alec Macdonald saw them, Sybil and the doctor were walking alone.

Gordon nodded confidentially towards them.

'Heigho, Macdonald! As soon as the lassies grow up they are anxious to get away from the old men. Look at those two! Sybil never conceals her likes, and, 'pon my word, Rutherford should be flattered by her preference.'

Alec's face changed, and he glanced sharply at the two. He could not fail to notice the change in Sybil from grave to gay, and for a moment his heart sank within him. Then his trust in her again asserted itself. She loved him, and Rutherford could be nothing to her.

Gordon was swinging a rose lightly in his hand, and he went on, ignoring Alec's silence.

'Sybil looks quite blooming to-day. Lately I have thought her quiet and pale, but evidently Rutherford knows how to cure that. Well, I suppose we shall be having a wedding at the Towers this summer.'

'A wedding!' Alec echoed, blankly.

'Yes,—Sybil's. It's quite an old affair between her and the doctor; I fancy they understood each other before she went to

Berlin. I'm not sure,' Gordon continued, discursively, when Alec made no reply, 'that you mightn't have had a chance with her if he had not had first innings. She thinks no end of you for saving her life. Perhaps, I don't know—women are kittle cattle—you might have suited her better than Rutherford; he is a nice lad, but he thinks too much of position, and has too keen an eye for the bawbee. However, since Sybil likes him, there's no more to be said.'

Alec answered nothing, and turned his face towards the sea, that Gordon might not observe the shadow his words had thrown on his face. All the beauty and gladness had gone from the summer morning, and the flash of the waves in the sunlight was like a mocking smile.

Sybil's refusal was now explained. Even

then he did not doubt her love for him, but excused her; telling himself that she had all along been pledged to Rutherford, whom she did not love, but to whom she would still be faithful. He had seen her beauty fading through the last months, and the thing that had repelled Rutherford had only attracted him the more. He had longed so to comfort her and bring the gladness back to her eyes, and yet he had not dared to break down the constraint with which she treated him. Now Rutherford had accomplished the task he had not attempted, and Sybil's face was bright in the sunshine.

His eyes were full of pain when the two groups met, but the touch of Sybil's hand told him that he was not mistaken;—she loved him and not Rutherford.

It is difficult to know where the con-

solation lay in this thought, since he believed she was going to marry a man for whom she did not care, but it is certain he extracted some comfort from it, for under its influence his eyes brightened.

Gordon glanced towards Sybil.

'Here's a rose for you, Sybil.'

She looked up wistfully at him, and the colour rushed to her face at his words. Surely his estrangement from her was giving way when he could show her this attention! Her eyes were full of tears as she took the flower and fastened it in her dress.

'Is it really for me? Thank you, daddy.'

'Don't thank me,' he said, almost roughly; 'it's Ladislaw's present. He says there's not another rose of the kind

in Belhaven, and he has been keeping it for you.'

Bessie looked meaningly at Sybil, who, hurt and disappointed at the rough tones, had coloured painfully, and could scarcely restrain her tears. Gordon turned with a frown to Rutherford.

'Macdonald is coming out for tennis this afternoon, and Miss Haldane. Will you join them and make the quartette?'

Alec listened gloomily to the words. He would not have accepted Gordon's invitation had he thought Rutherford was to be of the party. However, he could not refuse to go now without actual discourtesy. At the same time he was conscious of an insane desire, only controlled by his practical good sense, to thrash his rival.

He was a thoroughly sweet-natured

fellow, and after a vigorous mental handling of himself he regained his usual cheerfulness, and put aside the fear of what the summer might bring if Gordon proved a true prophet.

Rutherford required no pressing to accept the invitation, and then the two groups parted, Gordon and Alec going towards the bank, the others to the harbour.

'Well, good day,' the doctor said at last, 'but, however, I'll see you again this afternoon. I won't forget that you will not marry a Scotchman, Miss Haldane!'

Bessie pouted and moved away, and, after a moment, Rutherford turned and gazed after them with a smile on his lips as he thought of her disdain of the Scotch.

While he looked, he saw Sybil's rose lying unheeded on the grass where it had fallen from her dress.

He was in that stage of love-fever when whatever the beloved has touched is sacred. The flower had rested on Sybil's bosom, so he picked it up, and, despising himself for his sentiment, fastened it in his coat.

Alec met him with it afterwards, and the sight sent a pang of jealousy through his good honest heart. He had not yet decided what course to take in order to prevent Sybil wrecking her happiness and his, but he was not going to let Rutherford marry her if he could help it. His resolute face became stern with purpose, and the firm lines gathering about brow and chin spoke of resolve. Yet he was tortured by the ghost of a doubt,—would Sybil have given Rutherford the rose had she been quite indifferent to him? The fear haunted him, but

he played tennis a few hours later as if he had not a care on his soul. He was not given to wearing his heart on his sleeve, and he took the good the gods provided with humble gratitude when he found himself Sybil's partner against Bessie and Rutherford;—an arrangement, by the way, that gave unalloyed satisfaction to all but their host, whom it cast on Mrs. Haldane's mercies.

Gordon did not exert himself to talk to her, but threw himself down on the lawn, and watched Bessie with clouded eyes of jealousy. She was playing a brilliant game with Rutherford, and, seeing her gaiety, Gordon's face darkened. What if, after all, she too should escape him?

He was more truly in love with her than he knew; and the failure of his efforts to rouse her passion spurred his pursuit of

her. For once he was uncertain of himself, and his egotism failed to reassure him.

He bit a blade of grass between his teeth, and the action reminded him of the king who was cast out from power and position to herd with the beasts of the field.

'Will that be my case?' he thought, gloomily; and for the next ten minutes he gave himself up to morbid yet healthy brooding over the unsatisfactory past, and the yet more unsatisfactory present.

CHAPTER XVII.

PALMISTRY.

'Even in this hour his sin's unsheltered avower.'

The maid had brought tea out on the lawn, and they were glad to throw themselves down under the trees after a well-contested game, in which Sybil and Alec had vanquished their opponents.

'We are practically equal,' said Bessie, airily, 'and we shall win the next sett. I have been reading Dr. Rutherford's fortune, and his hand says we shall beat you.'

'Does palmistry reveal the past as well as the future?' Gordon asked.

His gloomy mood had vanished with Bessie's return to his side.

'Of course! Are you sceptical as to its powers?'

Bessie raised her brows provokingly.

'I am a sensible man,' Gordon said, as though answering her question.

The reply seemed to ruffle Bessie's dignity, and after a queer observant glance and a momentary hesitation, in which her face lost some of its colour, she crossed to Gordon's side and took his hand, peering curiously into the lined palm.

As she looked, the colour deepened on her cheek, her eyes began to sparkle, and she laughed into his face like incarnate mischief.

'Your line of life is only fair—you

ought to have died when you fell down the mountain the other day. Yes, you distinctly omitted to do your duty then, for you die suddenly about forty-five.'

'I am forty-six, and not dead yet, Miss Bessie! But any sensible man will believe in palmistry after this.'

The glance accompanying the words was more than tender, and Mrs. Haldane noticed it and made a mental resolve to take Bessie away from Dunbar as soon as might be. She was much tried by their intimacy with the Gordons. Bessie's wild flirtation, in spite of her denials, bordered on something more serious than frivolity; and Mrs. Haldane lived in constant terror lest her daughter should bow her neck to the yoke of matrimony.

She was listening with mixed feelings to the diagnosis of Gordon's hand, being held

as it were between two forces,—the centrifugal force of her girlhood which led her to sympathise with Bessie's daring, and the centripetal force of her artificial nature which prompted her to check the girl's mischief. The two forces were *en évidence* in her face, her firmly-pursed mouth being under better control than the eager eyes which betrayed the still unbridled spirit.

'Go on, Miss Bessie. I want to know how many times I am to be married.'

He bent and looked directly into her face, and her eyes met his calm and unperturbed. But, in spite of their calmness, Gordon was well-satisfied, for he saw from her quivering lips that he had power to move her.

'Am I to be married twice, Miss Bessie? Surely *you* can tell me!' he said, significantly.

She knitted her pretty brows over the hand she held, and then looked steadily at him.

'No, you will be married only once.'

Her voice was very grave, but in a moment she threw off the gravity and smiled coquettishly at him.

'Your line of love is worthless, you are so deplorably selfish. Moreover, there is a sad tendency to flirtation.'

'I know there is—in your presence. Proceed!'

'Line of the head capital,' Bessie continued. 'You are created for scheming, and managing, and calculating.'

'I suppose no one here guesses I am a banker,' said Gordon, looking round with a smile.

'Oh, don't mock, sir! Wait till I have finished. I could not have believed you

were such a bad character. Here is a line saying you are utterly unscrupulous; and here is another that says you are horribly revengeful—in fact, you never forgive an injury. You have no veneration for anything or anybody, and would as soon as not sacrifice your friends to save yourself.'

'You see, I have all the elements that make a successful man!' Gordon exclaimed, looking radiant. 'This is really interesting.—I believe in your science, Miss Bessie. It has a chief feature of all scientific theories,—it is unreliable. Well——'

'Line of fortune good up to a certain point,' Bessie went on, ignoring the remark. 'Then you lose all your money.'

'Ho, ho!' Gordon laughed, 'do you hear that, Sybil? Can you tell me when the catastrophe takes place?'

'It is past,' said Bessie, comically. 'At forty-four it should have occurred.'

'And I am forty-six, and out of the workhouse! What more do you see?'

'Your line of fate is bad. A great happiness succeeded by a great sorrow—a great crime followed by——'

She stopped abruptly and looked up. His face was unchanged, his eyes still smiled down into hers, but the hand she held had turned to ice in her grasp.

'I believe I have frightened you at last,' she said, nodding triumphantly at him. 'Now, confess I have!'

'So I will—in a moment; but I see Sandy cutting my favourite geranium—stupid fellow. Hillo! Sandy, have a care! What are you doing, man?'

He took his hand from Bessie's to make a trumpet; and Sandy, at the other end

of the garden, heard the shout, and came hobbling across the lawn.

'Is it my best geranium you are cutting, Sandy?' Gordon asked.

'Na, na,' the old man answered, a strange glitter in his little, beady eyes. 'It's no' the *Leddy Sybil*, but yon scarlet rascal Missie hersel' namit the *Robert Gordon!* It's rin a' to leaves an' stalk, an' it cummers the groond juist. An' ech, sirs! I wad the mon himsel' wad min' the lesson gien by the bit flooer! Oh, Robert Gordon! Robert Gordon! the laddie o' a hunder' prayers, gin you dinna turn fra your evil ways you sall likewise be cuttit aff oot o' the lan' o' the livin'.

'Hoots toots, Sandy!—get away to your work and leave the minister to his trade,' said Gordon, with a wink that included the whole party, even to Mrs. Haldane.

Sybil did not see it. Her eyes were bent on the ground, and her face was crimson with shame for her father.

Rutherford was gazing at his host with admiration of his unconcerned air, while Alec was smiling at Sandy's earnestness.

The old man was too much in earnest to be easily silenced.

'It's no the meenister that will touch your heart, I'm dootin',' he said, drily, 'gin you canna hear the tongues o' the flooers; an' I hae nae wark that doesna cry to you to repent. I promised the little maid I wadna rest till your soul were savit,—an' I winna!'

Sandy glared defiantly at his master, but, comical as his appearance was, there was a dignity in the words that checked the laugh on Bessie's lips. She looked at his glittering eyes, his shrunken figure,

and the knotted hand in which he held the lank stem of scarlet geranium; and then her eyes turned to Gordon. His handsome face was full of amusement, as he stood, hand in pocket, a little apart from the group, regarding Sandy with tolerant attention.

'Ah, Miss Bessie, what have you done?' he cried, with pretended dismay;—'you gave me a bad name, and now Sandy would hang me.'

'That wad I!' said Sandy, with unexpected vigour, darting a hungry glance at Gordon's smiling face.

Then the animation faded from his features; his old eyes became dim, and he turned away, muttering,—

'God forgie me! an' I promist the little maid no' to bear malice. But I'm dootin' even the Almichty will no' find it sae

easy to save an ill-like rascal like yon!'

Gordon stood watching him in silence, the smile on his face giving way to an ugly scowl as Sandy disappeared.

'By heaven, you may go too far,' he muttered, between his clenched teeth. 'If you think I am going to stand another scene like this, you will find yourself mistaken, old man!'

His face did not clear for some time after this little scene; but an hour later his eyes were smiling into Bessie's as though no cloud could ever darken them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALEC IS TEMPTED.

'Yet woe to thee if once thou yield!'

It was early morning, and the waves lapping on the shore seemed to be rousing from their sleep.

The fishing-boats lay off the harbour becalmed, waiting for the tide to enter. Seen from the sea, Dunbar was still asleep. There was no smoke rising, no movement or life to show that the dawn had broken.

Down in the fishers' quarter the women were always early astir, but cliff-wards

the houses were silent and slumberous, and only one figure was visible on the path.

Alec was going earlier than usual for his morning plunge, and after his sleepless night the cool air was fresh against his hot forehead.

All night long he had been striving to solve the problem of his relations with Sybil. He could not doubt that she loved him; but, by her father's account, she was pledged to Rutherford, and honour forbade her to break her promise even for love's sake.

He was not sentimental, and he took the right view of the situation. Nothing could justify a woman's marriage with a man she did not love. He saw quite well how the complication had arisen. Rutherford's handsome face had taken the girl's fancy, and she had mistaken admiration for love.

Then, when the woman had been awakened, she had to renounce the true love for the false.

It was a difficult task that lay before Alec. How could he plead for himself, regardless of the suffering he should cause his rival if Sybil yielded to him? Yet how could he remain passive and let her wreck her happiness and his? She loved him;—nothing could shake his trust in that, and yet she had refused to be his wife.

His brow was furrowed with care, and as he clambered over the rocks he saw no honourable way out of his difficulty. It was a relief to be by himself, and to ponder over the situation in solitude.

The pool in which he usually bathed was dangerous by reason of a secret current, and he was almost the only one who

braved its treacherous depths, so that he was surprised on nearing it to see a man already in the water.

It was Dr. Rutherford; and, knowing he was not an expert swimmer, Alec shouted a warning to him. But he had come too late.

At his shout the doctor turned a ghastly face towards him with a look that haunted Alec for many a long day after. He had been caught in the current, and was even then being dragged down to death.

The moment that followed was one of fierce temptation. Springing from rock to rock, Alec's impulse had been to throw off his coat and plunge in to Rutherford's help, but while he ran temptation came. Here was the solution of his difficulty.

'Let him go!' the devil whispered, 'and

your happiness is safe. Sybil will not grieve for him, and his death will remove the only obstacle to your marriage. Let him save himself if he can. If he can't, you have nothing to do with it.'

While Alec ran on, Rutherford sank and rose again, struggling with the current, battling with dear life. He was almost exhausted, and was altogether at Alec's mercy.

Macdonald shot a swift glance along the cliffs, around him, everywhere. Not a creature was in sight. There was none to witness did he yield; none to say a man had stood on the rocks and allowed another to perish unaided. Who can gauge the strength of such a temptation? Who will say it was his duty to risk his own life to save that of his rival? His

face was bloodless as the thought, swifter than lightning, flashed through his brain.

Once more Rutherford rose, for the third—the last time, and Alec's hand tugged instinctively at his coat to remove it.

He was plunging in to the help of the drowning man when he stopped . . . . At his feet lay Rutherford's coat, and in the button-hole was a faded rose,—the one that Gordon had given to Sybil the day before!

A hard look locked Alec's face, and though he heard the faint gurgling cry of Rutherford's last agony, he stood on the rocks an instant—motionless!

The next moment he had flung the

temptation from him, and was in the water struggling with the drowning man.

He had as much as he could do to keep afloat, for Rutherford clung to him like grim death and it needed skill as well as courage to maintain his advantage.

In vain he struggled to reach the shore, in vain he tried to free himself from that deathly grip ; Rutherford's clutch was that of a dying man, and Alec's strength was as nothing beside that hold of despair. He shouted aloud, though he knew how unlikely it was that anyone should be in that lonely spot so early. There was no reply, and he saw that he must help himself if either of the two were to be saved.

Standing on the rocks a short time before, it would not have been so hard to

remain passive and let Rutherford go down to his death. But now it seemed nothing less than murder to unloose his arms and leave him to his fate. He could not do it. While strength lasted it should be spent for both.

He had no thought now of Sybil. Face to face with death, life appeared small and unimportant. He was only conscious that if he died Sybil would be his for ever, and she would give him in death the love she had refused in life.

But he was not going to die without a struggle. Making a stout fight for life, he supported Rutherford and shouted over and over again. Then, when strength and voice were almost exhausted, a heavy body splashed into the water, and he felt himself seized by the collar and being

dragged to land. He was conscious of hands reaching from above and pulling him on to the rocks; and then a great darkness blinded him, and he knew no more.

On the rocks Don stood, wagging his tail, and looking up to Sandy with bright eyes: while Sandy himself was wondering how he was to bring aid to the two helpless men the dog had rescued from the waters. He, with Don, had been on the rocks gathering dulse, and had heard Alec's shouts in time to be of use.

The dog it was who had brought the men to land, and, while Sandy hesitated, he sprang away, and soon returned with some fishermen, by whose efforts both Alec and Rutherford were eventually brought round.

When the story of the rescue was told at the Towers a few hours later, Sybil became very white, and then turned away with a proud flash in her eye. But Bessie clapped her hands, and exclaimed that Robin Adair was more than a commonplace hero after all!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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